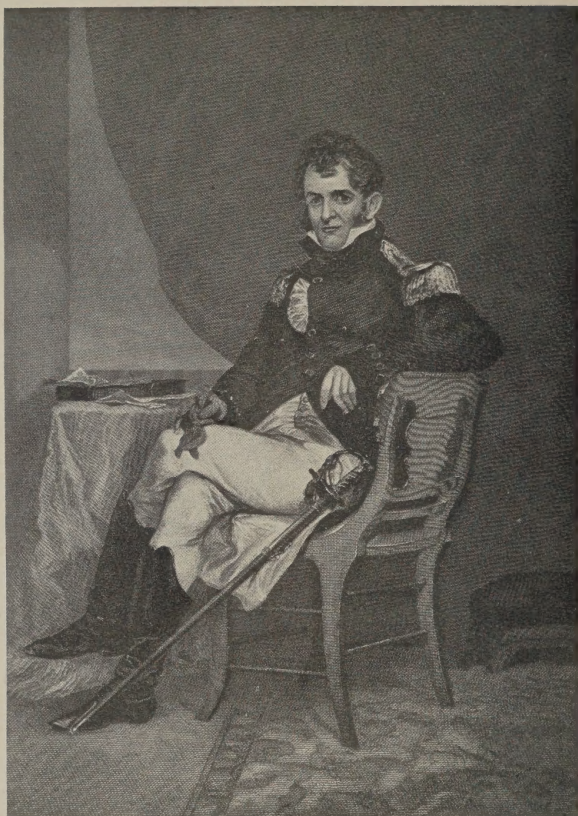




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COMMODORE DAVID PORTER

Commander of the West India Squadron

From an engraving in the Bradlee collection.

OUR NAVY
AND
THE WEST INDIAN PIRATES

By GARDNER W. ALLEN

With an Introduction by
REAR ADMIRAL CASPAR F. GOODRICH
UNITED STATES NAVY

ESSEX INSTITUTE
SALEM, MASS.
1929

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OUR NAVY

AND

THE WEST INDIES

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1929

To the Memory of
CASPAR FREDERICK GOODRICH
Rear Admiral United States Navy
1847 - 1925

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REAR ADMIRAL CASPAR F. GOODRICH
Courtesy of U. S. Naval Institute

PREFACE

The career of piracy in the West Indies during the first quarter of the nineteenth century and its suppression form an episode briefly alluded to or inadequately treated in historical works. For many years our navy and that of Great Britain contended with pirates, hardships, and yellow fever in these tropical seas and finally brought the evil system to an end. The adventures and devoted service of naval seamen and the sufferings of merchantmen deserve recognition and more extended notice.

Several years ago Admiral Goodrich collected nearly all the material relating to this subject and published it in the *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*. Recently he very kindly placed it at the disposal of the present writer. The collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Boston Public Library, the Boston Athenæum, and the Harvard College Library have been made use of, for which acknowledgments are due.

GARDNER W. ALLEN.

Boston,
April, 1925.

NOTE.—After long and distinguished service in the navy, Admiral Goodrich died December 26, 1925. He was deeply interested in the subject here presented, to which he devoted much time and labor in unearthing the original sources. His earnest wish was almost a command and without it this little book would never have been written.

January, 1929.

G. W. A.

INTRODUCTION

If he were interrogated as to his acquaintance with his navy, its history and its services to the nation and to humanity, the average American citizen would boastfully speak of John Paul Jones in the Revolution, of Hull in the War of 1812, of Farragut in the Civil War, of Dewey in the War with Spain. Beyond these heroes, his ignorance would be profound. He does not know, probably he has never heard, of scores of other ways in which his navy has proved its value; for example in charting our coasts, in sounding the ocean depths for submarine cables, in actually helping to lay the first Atlantic cable, in protecting American commerce from Korea and Qualla Battoo to Cape Horn, in guarding American citizens from injury even in Christian lands and from massacre in the Far East, in making friends for the United States wherever our ships show the Stars and Stripes.

The average citizen is quite unaware of certain minor wars and activities in which his navy's part has yielded results beyond price or praise. It is to bring some of these important, if less spectacular episodes to the attention of the public that Dr. Allen has given us his *Naval War with France* and *Our Navy and the Barbary Corsairs*. All of these products of his pen are characterized by accuracy of statement and—a charming readability.

In this new volume, he carries us back a hundred years and more to tell the story of what the navy did to suppress piracy in the waters along our coast or not far from our Atlantic seaboard. The narrative abounds in thrills, not to say horrors, while doing justice to the terrible conditions of discomfort, toil and danger, chiefly climatic, under which our brave officers and men labored during weary years with little reward save an approving con-

science. The same painstaking study of original documents which already marked his previous books makes this a trustworthy guide and practically an exhaustive presentation of the facts. Withal, in so attractive a style as to appeal even to the casual reader.

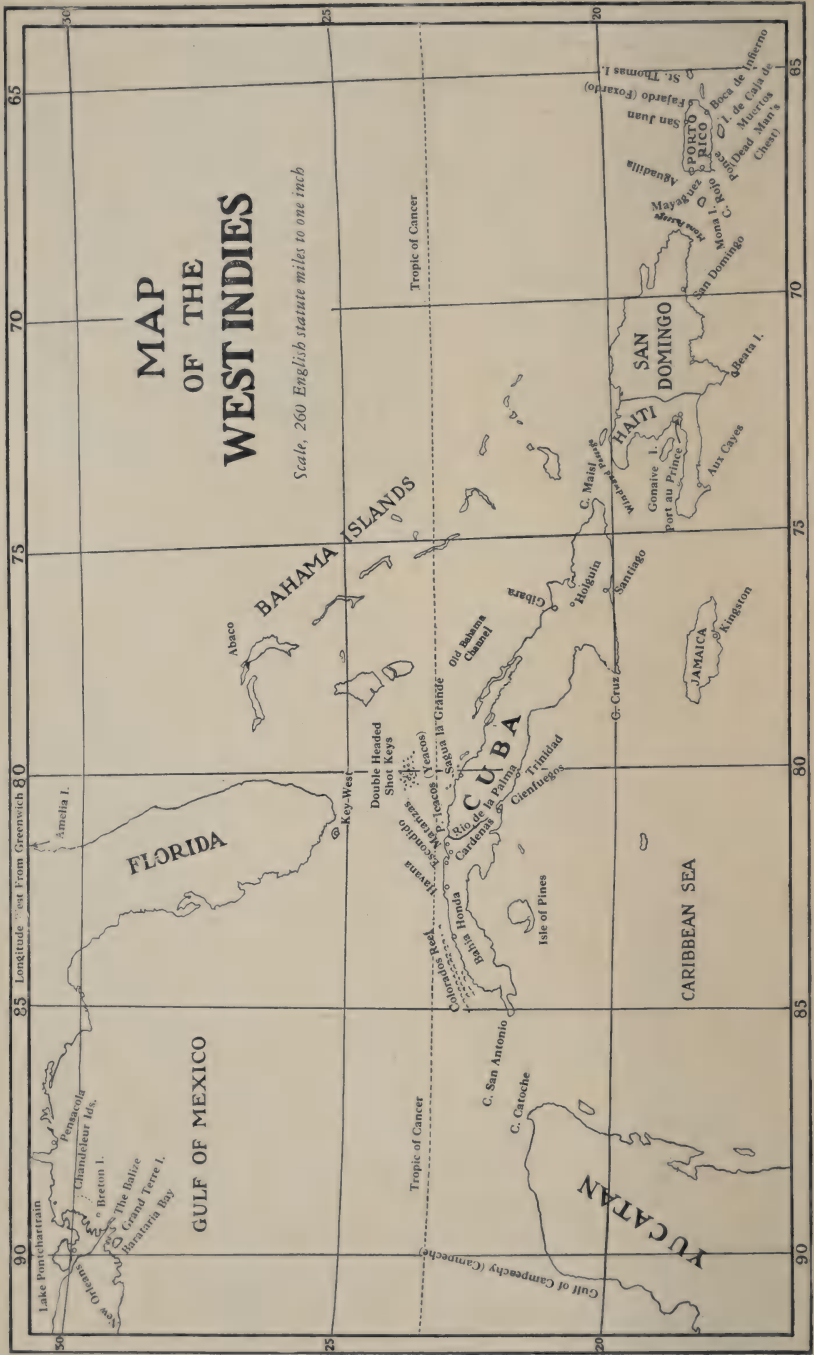
I am very glad to have helped Dr. Allen in collecting some of the data he uses and to have urged him to undertake the writing of this little volume whose contents ought to be widely broadspread in order that the usefulness of our navy in time of peace as well as of war may be more generally recognized.

It is a patriotic duty which he has performed in thus making such matters known to our people who, too commonly, regard this first line of the national defence as useful only during hostilities and as an undue burden at other times. It is idle to expect that, until the millennium arrives, it will ever be wholly exempt from calls to aid. Even now, by the way, it has to keep a force on the Yangtse River for the safeguarding of American property and lives. Nor, until that blessed day, will it be wise to allow to fall into disrepair or impotence an arm which cannot be improvised over night. To be of worth when the emergency arises, it must be always kept in a high state of efficiency.

While piracy no longer exists save in rare and isolated cases, only a prophet can assure us that needs of naval work in days of peace are things of the past. Those who give themselves the pleasure of reading these interesting pages will thank their author for reminding them afresh that their navy has never yet failed them, even when its duty was as difficult, laborious, unsanitary, and perilous as that which he here depicts so faithfully.

CASPAR F. GOODRICH.

Princeton, New Jersey,
April, 1925.



MAP OF THE WEST INDIES

Scale, 260 English statute miles to one inch

Lake Pontchartrain
 Lake Okechobee
 Lake Seminole
 Chamblee I.
 Beaton I.
 The Bahice
 Grand Terre I.
 Maratona Bay

GULF OF MEXICO

FLORIDA

BAHAMA ISLANDS

CUBA

YUCATAN

CARIBBEAN SEA

HAITI

SAN DOMINGO

PUERTO RICO

Florida I.

Abaco

Key West

Double Headed

Short Keys

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

St. Ignace

C. San Antonio

C. Oatuche

Isle of Pines

Key West

Florida I.

Key West

Florida I.

Key West

Florida I.

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OUR NAVY AND THE WEST INDIAN PIRATES.

BY GARDNER W. ALLEN.

I. BEGINNINGS.

The privateers and buccaneers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were nearly always provided with occupation in the West Indies. The Spanish treasure ships excited the cupidity of French, English, and Dutch navigators. When nominal peace between the great powers prevailed, this warfare on the sea continued with little interruption and became a sort of legalized piracy. After the Spanish succession was settled, in 1713, war was less frequent and treaties of peace more strictly observed. As the opportunities for privateering became fewer, the trade no longer attracted the better class of seafaring men. The race of romantic, almost respectable, buccaneers had passed away, and their successors degenerated into pirates and common murderers.

In the eighteenth century piracy flourished throughout the North Atlantic, and conditions in the West Indies were favorable to its growth. The shores of the mainland surrounding the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea and of the islands, many parts of which were uninhabited, abounded in secluded harbors, coves, and passages among dangerous reefs, inaccessible to vessels of size. The dense growth of mangroves at the water's edge made concealment and escape easy. Fish, fruit, and other foods were plentiful. A rich commerce furnished victims.

During the American Revolution, privateers swarmed in the West Indies—American, British, French and Spanish; but their operations, it may be presumed, were legiti-

mate. In later years, during the long and bitter struggle between England and France, from 1793 to 1815, privateers acting under French edicts and British orders in council, included neutrals within the scope of their attentions. The United States suffered grievously from this state of things, which led to our hostilities with France in 1798, and—together with the still more aggravating impressment of seamen—to the War of 1812 with Great Britain.

Throughout this long period of the French Revolution and the wars of Napoleon perhaps some of the regularly commissioned privateers behaved in a manner somewhat piratical. The privateers of both France and Spain, cruising so far from their home governments, were under very little restraint, and there was a tendency to excesses not authorized by their commissions. The pirates of a later day, whose exploits are to engage our attention in following chapters, doubtless counted among their number some of these old French and Spanish privateers. Perhaps the difference between a piratical privateer and a true pirate was that the former was a robber but not a murderer, while the latter was both. However the privateers may have conducted themselves, actual piracy prevailed at the same time, and sporadic cases are reported in contemporary newspapers.

Especially in the waters about Haiti, while the revolution of Toussaint l'Ouverture was going on, native pirates of the most cold-blooded sort lay in wait for victims of all nations. Whether these picaroons, or any of them, were commissioned by the Revolutionary government of Haiti is doubtful. The vessels used by them were barges manned by crews of thirty or forty, pulling twenty oars, and armed with swivels. Their favorite hunting ground was the Gulf of Gonaive, at the western end of Haiti. Merchantmen were helpless before them and they even attacked small men-of-war when becalmed. It was necessary for United States naval commanders to furnish convoy. On New Year's Day, 1800, the U. S. schooner *Experiment*, commanded by Lieutenant William Maley, with a convoy of four merchantmen, was attacked by ten

of these barges manned by four or five hundred men, off the Island of Gonaive. There was a dead calm and it was impossible for the schooner to manœuvre and protect her convoy. Two of them drifted out of gunshot and were captured by the pirates. Fortunately their crews escaped in the boats. By good management the *Experiment* saved herself and two of the merchantmen, sunk three of the barges, and killed a great number of men. The American loss was one killed and two wounded. Commodore Silas Talbot, in the frigate *Constitution*, the local commander-in-chief at this time, issued orders for giving convoy to American merchantmen arriving at Môle St. Nicholas, at the northwestern extremity of Haiti. The frigate *Boston*, Captain George Little, soon afterwards fell in with nine piratical barges, and in the course of a running fight, lasting two hours and a half, disabled five of them.¹

President Jefferson's annual message of December 3, 1805, while not particularly mentioning the West Indies, tells of general conditions afloat in connection with our foreign relations: "Our coasts have been infested and our harbors watched by private armed vessels, some of them without commissions, some with illegal commissions, others with those of legal form but committing piratical acts beyond the authority of their commissions. They have captured, in the very entrance of our harbors as well as on the high seas, not only the vessels of our friends coming to trade with us, but our own also. They have carried them off under pretense of legal adjudication; but not daring to approach a court of justice, they have plundered and sunk them by the way or in obscure places, where no evidence could arise against them, maltreated the crews and abandoned them in boats in the open sea or on desert shores, without food or covering. These enormities appearing to be unreachd by any control of their sovereigns, I found it necessary to equip a force to cruise within our own seas, to arrest all vessels of these descriptions found hovering on our coasts within the limits of the

¹ *Massachusetts Spy*, March 5, May 7, August 20, 1800; *Columbian Centinel*, March 29, July 23, November 1, 1800.

Gulf Stream, and to bring the offenders in for trial as pirates." The force employed "to cruise within our own seas" consisted of the frigate *Adams*, Captain Alexander Murray. More than that might have been done, it would seem, for the protection of the merchant marine.

II. THE BARATARIANS.

Privateers and freebooters, sailing under the flags of France, Spain, and England, infested the mouth of the Mississippi River and the neighboring waters. The difficulties connected with establishing a government and maintaining order in the recently acquired Louisiana Territory were complicated by the lawlessness and excesses of these buccaneers. New Orleans, which was doubtless what would now be described as a "wide-open" town, was a convenient port in which to refit and procure supplies. Being unfrequented by foreign ships of war, it was comparatively safe. Here the privateersmen spent their money freely, mingled with the dregs of the population, and kept the town in a state of turmoil. The more reckless and dissolute among them easily passed the shadowy border line between privateering and piracy. They seized and plundered not only their enemies' vessels, but American shipping as well. Within a few years the bays and inlets of Louisiana had become a favorite rendezvous of pirates.

A naval station with a force of about twenty gunboats and four hundred men was established at New Orleans, and in 1806 Captain John Shaw was put in command. He was succeeded in 1808 by Master Commandant David Porter. At this time Porter was twenty-eight years old and had already shown his sterling qualities in service against the Barbary pirates and in the naval hostilities with France. Soon after his arrival at New Orleans he took strong measures against these disturbers of the peace. Descending the river with a force of gunboats, he captured three of the most troublesome French privateers. His proceedings were legal under Acts of Congress which authorized the employment of national forces in such cases and the confiscation of foreign vessels interfering with commerce within the waters of the United States.

Under great difficulties Porter succeeded in procuring the condemnation of his prizes.²

Porter remained in charge of the station two years or more. Numerous prizes were captured in Louisiana waters and along the gulf coast during his stay and afterwards. On March 15, 1813, Governor Claiborne, of Louisiana, issued a proclamation against "a considerable number of banditti composed of individuals of different nations who have armed and equipped several vessels, with the design to cruise at sea and to commit depredations and piracies against the vessels of nations who are at peace with the United States, in order to carry on with the inhabitants of this state an illicit commerce in provisions and merchandise."³

The most celebrated Louisiana pirate, though there is some doubt as to whether he was in the full sense a pirate, was Jean Lafitte, who had an establishment on the Island of Grand Terre in Barataria Bay, west of the mouth of the Mississippi. Lafitte was a native of France who had lived in Louisiana since about 1809. His commercial interests were more concerned with smuggling than with piracy. He stoutly maintained that he had never preyed upon American commerce, but only upon that of Spain. He helped the American cause at the time of the Battle of New Orleans, at least to the extent of refusing strong inducements to join the British. Those Baratarians who aided in the defence of New Orleans were pardoned for their previous misdeeds by the President of the United States, an act of clemency not justified by subsequent events.⁴

Commodore Porter's successor in command was Commodore Daniel T. Patterson. One of his earliest achievements was a successful attack on the pirate stronghold at Barataria. As related in his report to the Secretary of the Navy, Hon. William Jones, dated October 10, 1814, he left New Orleans September 11, "accompanied by Colonel Ross with a detachment of seventy of the 44th

² *Memoir of Commodore David Porter*, 74-81; *Naval Chronicle*, 335; *Philadelphia Gazette*, August 9, 1809.

³ *Niles' Register*, May 1, 1813.

⁴ *Papers and Messages of the Presidents*, I, 559.

regiment of infantry—on the 12th reached the schooner *Carolina*, at Plaquemine and formed a junction with the gun vessels at the Balize [mouth of the Mississippi] on the 13th. Sailed from the south-west pass on the evening of the 15th and at half past 8 a. m. on the 16th made the Island of Grand Terre (Barataria), and discovered a number of vessels in the harbor, some of which showed Carthaginian⁵ colors. At 9 perceived the pirates forming their vessels, ten in number including prizes, into a line of battle near the entrance of the harbor and making every preparation to offer me battle. At 10, wind light and variable, formed the order of battle with the six gun vessels, . . . the *Sea-Horse* tender, mounting one 6-pounder and fifteen men, and a launch mounting one 12-pound carronade, the schooner *Carolina* drawing too much water to cross the bar. At half past 10 perceived several smokes along the coast as signals and at the same time a white flag hoisted on board a schooner at the fore, an American flag at the main-mast head, and a Carthaginian flag (under which the pirates cruize) at her topping-lift; replied with a white flag at my main. At 11 discovered that the pirates had fired two of their best schooners; hauled down my white flag and made the signal for battle, hoisting with it a large white flag bearing the words 'pardon to deserters,' having heard there were a number from the army and navy there who wished to return if assured of pardon and which the president's proclamation offered till the 17th."

Two of Patterson's gunboats ran aground. The commodore manned his barge and the boats belonging to the grounded vessels and with the other four gunboats entered the harbor. "To my great disappointment," the report continues, "I perceived that the pirates had abandoned their vessels and were flying in boats in all directions. I immediately sent the launch and two gun barges with small boats in pursuit of them. At meridian took possession of all their vessels in harbor, consisting of six schooners and one felucca, cruisers and prizes of the pirates, one brig, a prize, and two armed schooners under the Car-

⁵ Colombian.

thaginian flag, both in the line of battle with armed vessels of the pirates and apparently with an intention to aid them in any resistance they might make against me, as their crews were at quarters, tompions out of their guns, and matches lighted. Colonel Ross at the same time landed and with his command took possession of their establishment on shore, consisting of about forty houses of different sizes, badly constructed and thatched with palmetto leaves."

Patterson had hoped that the enemy would stand fast and receive his attack, which would have enabled him to take prisoners; but the result was satisfactory as it was. "The enemy had mounted on their vessels twenty pieces of cannon of different calibre, and as I have since learnt, from eight hundred to one thousand men of all nations and colors."

A few days later a sail was seen approaching the island. The *Carolina* weighed anchor and gave chase. For about an hour the two kept up a running fire and the stranger then grounded. The shoalness of the water prevented the *Carolina* from getting nearer, but the gunboats opened fire across the island and the vessel soon hauled down her colors. She was taken possession of and proved to be a Carthaginian armed schooner called the *General Bolivar*. She was evidently in league with the pirates. "On the afternoon of the 23rd got under way with the whole squadron, in all seventeen vessels, but during the night one schooner under Carthaginian colors escaped. On the morning of the 24th entered the southwest pass of this river and on the 1st inst. arrived opposite this city with all my squadron."⁶

It was not long, however, before the Baratarians returned to their old haunts and took up again the interrupted threads of their prior existence. In a letter dated April 7, 1815, to the new Secretary of the Navy, Hon. Benjamin W. Crowninshield, Patterson says: "The immediate return of these people to their former mode of life will point out the indispensable necessity of keeping

⁶ *Niles*, November 19, 1814; *Master Commandants' Letters*, 1814, XI, No. 64.



COMMODORE DANIEL T. PATTERSON

From a portrait in the Naval Library, Washington, D. C.

Copied from the original in possession of
Major S. A. W. Patterson, U. S. M. C. of Doylestown, Penn.

a small active naval force on this station in time of peace." He purchased two schooners which, with his barges and launches, enabled him in some measure "to enforce the revenue, prevent smuggling and piracy, and protect the commerce of this port from the force which those lawless freebooters" then possessed, and which, unless checked, would rapidly increase. Governor Claiborne offered \$5,000 for Lafitte's head, while Lafitte offered \$50,000 for that of the governor.⁷

About this time, with the return of peace between the great powers, legitimate privateering came to an end. How many of the European privateers took up the profession of piracy is uncertain. But already a new class of privateers were entering the field. These were the swarms of vessels granted commissions by the various revolted colonies of Spain in Central and South America. These commissions were easy to obtain, being lavishly bestowed not only by the revolutionary governments but by individual commanders and others given authority for the purpose. Most privateers of this sort were virtual pirates from the start. The flags most commonly seen were the Mexican, Carthaginian (Colombian), and Venezuelan.

Writing again, April 17, to Secretary Crowninshield, Patterson observes: "Some months ago I wrote to the Honorable, your predecessor, soliciting instructions relative to Vessels sailing under Carthaginian Colors, for 'tis under this Flag that most of the Piracies are committed and there is now added to that the Flag of the Patriots of Mexico, which will, I have no doubt, be also used as a cloak for every species of violence, Plunder and Piracy. These Vessels come to this Port, are received with the Hospitality of the most favored Nations, repair, equip, and provision their Vessels, and clandestinely send off arms and men to the Sea Shore, with which to prey upon the commerce of this Port by capturing indiscriminately Vessels of every Nation bound thither, the cargoes of which are smuggled into this city, the Vessels are burned, and of their crews nothing is ever seen or heard. Permit me

⁷ *Captains' Letters*, 1815, III, No. 20. Patterson was promoted to captain February 28, 1815; *Emmons*, 78.

to request you to give me such instructions relative to armed Vessels under the above mentioned Flags as you may think necessary for my government.”⁸

Accounts of the doings of these freebooters began to appear in the papers. In April, 1816, the U. S. brig *Boxer*, Lieutenant John Porter, captured an armed schooner under Carthaginian colors, commanded by “a man named Mitchell, a most notorious Pirate. He had the hardihood to come into this River while the *Boxer* lay at the Balize, having on board fourteen slaves and plunder of various kinds to a large amount, retained from the unfortunate persons who took passage on Board his Schooner when flying from Cathagena—all of whom he landed on a small island on the Musquito Shore—and stolen from the Spanish Island of St. Andrews, the Governor of which with six Soldiers he caused to be shot. The Grand Jury have found a Bill against Mitchell and crew and they have been turned over to the Civil authority. The Vessel with the goods and effects found on Board her have been libelled for a Breach of the Slave laws.”⁹

It is necessary to admit that a good many American seamen, lured by the prospect of adventure and prize money, entered the service of these Spanish-American privateers. The fitting out of such irregular cruisers in United States ports was complained of to the Secretary of State, Hon. James Monroe, January 2, 1817, by the Spanish minister, Don Luis de Onis. “The mischiefs resulting from the toleration of the armament of privateers in the ports of this Union, and bringing into them with impunity the plunder made by these privateers on the Spanish trade for the purpose of distributing it among those merchants who have no scruples in engaging in these piracies, have risen to such a height that I should be wanting in my duty if I omitted to call your attention again to this very important subject.

“It is notorious that, although the speculative system of fitting out privateers and putting them under a foreign

⁸ *Captains' Letters*, 1815, III, No. 54.

⁹ *Captains' Letters*, 1816, II, No. 87 (April 24: Patterson to Navy Department).

flag, one disavowed by all nations, for the purpose of destroying the Spanish commerce, has been more or less pursued in all the ports of the Union, it is more especially in those of New Orleans and Baltimore where the greatest violations of the respect due to a friendly nation and, if I may say so, of that due to themselves, have been committed; whole squadrons of pirates having been fitted out from thence, in violation of the solemn treaty existing between the two nations, and bringing back to them the fruits of their piracies without being yet checked in these courses, either by the reclamations I have made, those of his Majesty's consuls, or the decisive and judicious orders issued by the President for that purpose." So tardy was the correction of these evils that the Spanish minister found it necessary to address repeated protests to our Department of State. The merchants of Havana, from 1808 to 1817, reported losses from the privateers of between two and three million dollars.¹⁰

Sometimes American seamen, disappointed or disillusioned, left this revolutionary service and found themselves stranded in foreign ports. The United States consul at St. Thomas, Robert M. Harrison, wrote to the Secretary of State, Hon. John Quincy Adams, April 20, 1817: "The increasing number of seamen, whose ill success in the privateers and pirates that infest those seas induces them to relinquish those unprofitable pursuits whenever an opportunity offers and who almost universally swarm to this island to claim my protection and support, so that they daily almost surround my door, renders it again my duty to request instructions from the Department of State. I have not yet extended to such men any more than a partial assistance—though many of them are in the greatest possible distress—considering that the expenditure of such large sums of money might be considered as advancing beyond the bounds of my duty. It is much to be regretted that the disappointment sustained by so great a number of our seamen should not be sufficient to deter

¹⁰ *American State Papers, Foreign Relations*, IV, 184 et seq.; *Guide to Materials for American History in Cuban Archives* (N. Y. Public Library), 58.

others from embarking in such enterprizes." Later the consul suggests the protection of American trade in the West Indies by a few United States cruisers. The British, by keeping a few naval vessels of war in West Indian waters had a great advantage over the Americans in the matter of trade.¹¹

Beverly Chew, collector of the customs at New Orleans, wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury, Hon. William H. Crawford, August 1, 1817, of violation of the revenue laws and laws against the slave trade "by a motley mixture of freebooters and smugglers at Galvezton under the Mexican flag and being in reality little else than the re-establishment of the Barrataria band, removed somewhat more out of the reach of justice. . . . Galvezton is a small island or sand-bar, situated in the Bay of St. Bernard on the coast of Texas, about ninety miles west of the Sabine, within jurisdictional limits claimed by the United States in virtue of the cession of Louisiana to them by France. The establishment was recently made there by a Commodore Aury with a few small schooners from Aux Cayes manned in great measure with refugees from Barrataria and mulattoes." These were reinforced by others "principally mariners (Frenchmen or Italians) who have been hanging loose upon society in and about New Orleans in greater or smaller numbers, ever since the breaking up of the establishment at Barrataria. . . . From this new station, fed and drawing all its resources from New Orleans and keeping up a regular intelligence through a variety of channels with their friends here, an active system of plunder was commenced on the high seas, chiefly of Spanish property but often without much concern as to the national character, particularly when money was in question. The captures made by their numerous cruisers—many owned by citizens of the United States—were condemned by a pretended court of admiralty there as prizes and the cargoes introduced into this State, principally in a clandestine manner. The vessels thus condemned have generally come here under new names and with the Mexican flag. Some of them have been detained

¹¹ *State Papers of the United States*, XI, 346, 347.

by the United States naval force, for hovering in our waters, and others have been libelled for restitution by the Spanish consul in behalf of the original owners; and though several trials have come on before the honorable the United States district court for the district of Louisiana and the claimants have never been able to produce proof of the Government of Galvezton having ever been authorized by the Mexican republic, restitution has been decreed in several instances.

“There is no evidence of the establishment having been made or sanctioned by or connected with a Mexican republic, if one be now existing; and the presumption of such an actual establishment, under such an authority, is strongly repelled by the illegal and piratical character of the establishment and its ambulatory nature. It is not only of very recent origin, but is clothed with no character or permanency, for it was abandoned about the 5th of April and transferred to Matagorda,¹² leaving at Galvezton only an advice boat, to advertise such privateers and prizes which might arrive there, of the spot on which they had fixed their new residence. . . . Among the most conspicuous characters who happened to be then at Galvezton, were many of the notorious offenders against our laws who had so lately been indulged with a remission of the punishment, who so far from gratefully availing themselves of the lenity of the Government to return to or commence an orderly and honest life, seem to have regarded its indulgence almost as an encouragement to a renewal of their offenses. You will readily perceive I allude to the Barratarians, among whom the Lafittes¹³ may be classed formost and most actively engaged in the Galvezton trade and owners of several cruisers under the Mexican flag.”¹⁴

The advantages of Galveston over Matagorda, from its proximity to Louisiana, were immediately apparent to the Baratarians, and they very soon re-established their government there and set up their court for the condemnation.

¹² About 100 miles southwest of Galveston.

¹³ Jean Lafitte had a brother Pierre.

¹⁴ *American State Papers, Foreign*, IV, 134-144; *State Papers of U. S.*, XI, 347.

of prizes. Aury and his followers, with their privateers and prizes, thirteen sail in all, left Matagorda or Galveston and went to Amelia Island, on the east coast of Florida, close to the Georgia line, where they settled. The U. S. brig *Saranac*, Master Commandant¹⁵ John H. Elton, was employed for several months in watching Aury's operations and the movements of his privateers about Amelia Island. Captain Charles Morris, in the frigate *Congress*, who had command of the West India squadron from December, 1816, to July, 1817, cruised in the Gulf of Mexico and off Balize in the spring. Several American vessels were stopped in the Gulf of Mexico and robbed of specie and other property by privateers of Mexico, Venezuela, and Buenos Ayres. In one case reported by Commodore Patterson on July 28, the brig *Charles* was boarded by a Mexican armed vessel "and robbed of all her papers and her mate detained on board." On December 22, 1817, Captain John D. Henley, in the U. S. corvette *John Adams*, with Major James Bankhead, U. S. A., appeared off Amelia Island and demanded its surrender. It was evacuated without resistance, but under protest by Commodore Aury.¹⁶

Galveston continued to be a base for privateering enterprises during the next year. General Humbert, a Frenchman, was governor at that time. He was captured on a schooner under Mexican colors by the U. S. ketch *Surprise*, Lieutenant Isaac McKeever, in the fall of 1818. A list of eleven privateers, commissioned by General Humbert under the Mexican flag, was enclosed in a letter written November 18 by Commodore Patterson to Secretary Crowninshield just after the capture of Humbert. It would seem that Galveston was by no means in a flourishing state at this time. "From everything I can learn," says the Commodore, "a total abandonment of Galveston by the Piratical Association will immediately take place,

¹⁵ Corresponding to the present grade of commander, which will hereafter be used as less cumbersome.

¹⁶ *State Papers of United States*, XI, 343-388, 395-411: letters of Harrison, Chew, Morris, Patterson, Elton, Henley, Bankhead, Aury, and others; *Autobiography of Commodore Charles Morris*, 76; *Captains' Letters*, 1817, III, No. 36.

if it has not already, in consequence of the frequent capture of their cruisers by U. S. Vessels, the great difficulty and loss they experience in introducing their Captured goods into the United States and the seductive invitation of Aury at old Providence, whither they will repair and under his commissions infest the West Indies." Commodore Aury, after leaving Amelia Island, had established himself at Old Providence, a small island in the Caribbean Sea.¹⁷

After the departure of General Humbert, Lieutenant Thomas S. Cunningham reconnoitered Galveston in the U. S. schooner *Firebrand* and reported that Lafitte was "the sole person in power; he is civil and Military Governor and Chief Judge, and in fact makes laws and governs at his own discretion, without any person to oppose his power. He resides on board an old prize brig." In October, 1819, Governor James Long of Texas appointed Lafitte governor of Galveston, with "power to grant letters of marque and reprisal against the King and subjects of Spain to all vessels within his government."¹⁸ Meanwhile Commodore Patterson urged on the newly-appointed Secretary of the Navy, Hon. Smith Thompson, the need of an additional force of two small vessels, with which he thought he "could very soon break up the Galveston association, suppress smuggling and protect the Revenue."¹⁹

In his annual message of 1818 President Monroe said: "The invasion of Amelia Island last year by a small band of adventurers not exceeding one hundred and fifty in number, who wrested it from the inconsiderable Spanish force stationed there and held it several months, during which a single feeble effort only was made to recover it, which failed, clearly proves how completely extinct the Spanish authority had become, as the conduct of those adventurers while in possession of the island as distinctly shows the pernicious purposes for which their combination had been formed."

Piracy in the Mississippi River and the bayous of the

¹⁷ *Captains' Letters*, 1818, III, No. 90, IV, No. 105.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1818, IV, No. 118, 1819, V, No. 38 (encl.).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1818, IV, No. 118.

Gulf coast continued in 1819. On July 17, Commodore Patterson reported certain "daring acts of Piracy having been committed, on the 10th inst. in this River and only a few miles above the Block House, on several merchant Vessels by a party of armed men, nine in number and in an open Boat. What renders this Robbery most extraordinary is that it was committed in open day and on several different Vessels, all in sight of and not far distant from each other, and that no opposition was attempted, though the Crews and Passengers of those Vessels must very greatly have exceeded the Pirates in number and force. This intelligence was received by me at 10 o'clock in this morning and at 3 P. M. a Force in fleet rowing Boats of twenty-eight officers and men were dispatched in pursuit of the Pirates by way of the River and thro' the Lakes and Bayous towards Barataria, and orders sent off for the *Bull Dog* [a 2-gun felucca] to proceed via the Chandeleur and Britton Isles to the Balize. One of these routes they must take." But the boat escaped. The supineness of the victims in this case is characteristic of the behavior of unorganized civilians unaccustomed to acting together under orders. Such piratical raids might be prevented, the Commodore thought, by stationing a vessel constantly in the river, but to do so in the summer and fall months "would be to condemn officers and men to almost certain Death."²⁰

With the inadequate force under his command, Patterson rendered the best service possible. At the end of September, 1819, he had the 18-gun sloop-of-war *Hornet*, Commander George C. Read, the 6-gun schooner *Lynx*, Lieutenant John R. Madison, the ketch *Surprise*, the felucca *Bull Dog*, a launch, and four gunboats. This little squadron was reinforced by the Revenue cutters *Alabama* and *Louisiana*. Some nests of pirates in the neighboring bayous were broken up and a few prisoners taken.²¹

²⁰ *Captains' Letters*, 1819, III, No. 73.

²¹ *Ibid.*, IV, No. 45.

III. PIRACY IN THE WEST INDIES.

The increasing aggressions of the piratical privateers of Spain's colonies, both those which had revolted and those which had not, had already compelled the adoption of effective measures by Congress. The act approved March 3, 1819, authorized the President to employ a suitable naval force for the protection of commerce and to instruct naval commanders to seize and send into port vessels committing depredations; it authorized merchantmen to oppose and to capture such vessels; it provided for the trial and condemnation of such captures and prescribed the death penalty for piracy. The act was to remain in force until the end of the next session of Congress. By subsequent acts it was continued as long as the need existed.²²

This action of our Government seemed to have the effect of increasing rather than diminishing the outrages of the freebooters. These comprised adventurers of every nationality. Cuban and Porto Rican vessels sailed under Spanish colors; those of the revolted colonies used the flags of the new republics of South and Central America. The latter were commissioned to cruise against Spanish ships, but extended their depredations to the commerce of other countries. The republics of Venezuela and Buenos Ayres were the worst offenders at this time. They issued commissions without limit or qualification to all comers. The blockade declared by these governments was also used as an instrument of plunder; vessels engaged in legitimate trade were seized under the pretense that they had violated the blockade. The Government of the United States was desirous of cultivating friendly relations with the new governments of Latin-America, but at the same time determined to put a stop to intolerable conditions. The situation must be handled with firmness

²² Acts of May 15, 1820, and January 30, 1823. See Appendix III.

and tact; an agent must be employed of judgment, energy, and discretion.²³

For this duty, diplomatic as well as military, Secretary Thompson, of the Navy Department, chose Captain Oliver H. Perry, who had won renown on Lake Erie. The first object to be sought was an interview with the government of Venezuela, and for this purpose it was necessary to ascend the Orinoco River three hundred miles to Angostura. As Perry's ship, the corvette *John Adams*, would be unable to pass the bar at the mouth of the river, the schooner *Nonsuch* was sent with him. The two vessels arrived off the mouth of the Orinoco July 15, 1819. Perry ordered the *John Adams* to Port Spain, Trinidad, and began the tedious ascent of the river in the *Nonsuch*.²⁴

On July 28 he had an interview with the Vice President of Venezuela. Of this he says in his diary: "I then furnished Mr. Zea with the two acts of our Congress with regard to neutrality and piracy, and demanded indemnity for various spoliations, particularly the unjust seizure of American property by the schooner *Brutus*, commanded by Nicholas Joly, under the Amelia Island flag, which property had been condemned illegally and sold within the territory of Venezuela. I also explained the view of the government with regard to privateers, and that commissions issued to them in blank were considered illegal. I asked also for an official list of those commissioned by Venezuela, that I might forward it to our government."²⁵

After long delay, on August 11, Perry received a reply from the Venezuelan Secretary of State, acknowledging the obligation of his government and promising early restitution; also, for the future, restriction of its privateers within narrower limits.²⁶ Perry weighed anchor on August 15 and dropped down the river. "He had succeeded in his mission, but at the cost of his life. He died of yellow fever at sea August 23, on board of the *Nonsuch*,"²⁷ at the age of thirty-four.

²³ MacKenzie's *Life of Perry*, II, 188.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 188, 190, 197.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 203.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

²⁷ Goodrich (*U. S. Naval Inst. Proc.*, XLII, 1930).

Captain Charles Morris was appointed to complete Captain Perry's mission to the republics of South America. For some months after July, 1817, Morris had been employed in diplomatic duties in Haiti and Venezuela. In September, 1819, he sailed for Buenos Ayres in the frigate *Constellation* with the *John Adams*, Commander Alexander S. Wadsworth. They went first to Montevideo, where they found the *Nonsuch*, Lieutenant Daniel Turner. Morris proceeded in the *John Adams* to Buenos Ayres, where he found conditions very unstable, due to frequent revolutions. He soon returned to the United States and made his report.²⁸

Public opinion in the United States was expressed in appeals to the Government. A letter dated Boston, December 1, 1819, signed by six presidents of insurance companies and addressed to President Monroe, enclosed a list of forty-four vessels which had been robbed. The signers observed: "Whether the late unparalleled increase of piracies is to be ascribed to defects in the laws of civilized nations, or the laws not being enforced, or to other causes, it is alike certain that it is an alarming and growing evil, which a just regard to the interest of commerce, no less than to the moral state of society, requires to be forthwith repressed."²⁹

Many Americans of previous good character had been induced to ship on board these so-called privateers and the demoralizing influence of such service was deplorable. Moreover, the loss of the men was severely felt by the maritime interests of the country. It was estimated that since the close of the War of 1812 the country had been drained of fifteen to twenty thousand seamen in this manner.³⁰

As nearly as can be ascertained it would seem that about forty pirates were sentenced to death throughout the United States in the latter part of 1819 and early in 1820. In New Orleans, where sixteen of them were convicted, there was much excitement and threats of rescue

²⁸ Morris's *Autobiography*, 77-82, 84-86.

²⁹ *National Intelligencer*, January 1, 1820.

³⁰ *Niles*, January 8, 1820.

and vengeance. Except four hangings in Charleston, there appears to be no accessible record of those actually executed. There is an unfortunate lack of information in regard to these cases.³¹

Piracy was carried on along the entire shore of the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea and among the islands, both the Bahamas and West Indies; and even occasionally off the southern Atlantic coast of the United States. There are reports of twenty-seven American vessels having been seized and robbed during the year 1820. Some of the marauders were captured, however. At the end of the year Secretary Thompson reported to the President "that, for the protection of our commerce in the West India Islands and parts adjacent the brig *Enterprise*, of 14 guns, schooner *Nonsuch*, of 8 guns, schooner *Lynx*, of 6 guns, and Gun Vessels *Nos. 158* and *168*, have been during the present year constantly cruising in the Gulf of Mexico, among the West India Islands, and along the southern coast of Florida and the United States; and in addition to this permanent force, all the ships and vessels of war proceeding from the United States or returning to the same from the Mediterranean, coast of Africa, or elsewhere, have instructions to take their route through the West India Islands, to afford protection to our commerce in that quarter and to give efficacy to the several acts of Congress for the suppression of the slave trade and capture of piratical vessels."³² The force named by the Secretary was far too small to cope with the situation, the gravity of which he failed to appreciate. Piracy was on the increase and the menace to American shipping was growing more serious.

The year 1821 opened with further appeals from the business community to Congress and as a result, "a number of small vessels were accordingly dispatched to the West Indies, but were so hampered by their instructions that they were obliged to surrender all pirates captured in Spanish American waters to the Cuban authorities for

³¹ *Ibid.*, January 15, March 25, May 27, June 17, 1820.

³² *Naval Affairs*, No. 38-5.

punishment, who, after a mockery of a trial, often released the wretches to commence anew their depredations."³³

There are few records of the first half of this year, but on July 16 the Navy Department is informed by Commodore Patterson that the *Lynx* and *Nonsuch* are employed "scouring our own coast from the Perdido to Sabine and generally run along the shores of Florida, then touch at Havana and Jamaica, etc., and return to the Balize, occasionally extending their cruise into the Bay of Campeachy and along the coast of Yuccatan." At the same time the *Bull Dog* was cruising on Lake Borgne and among the islands between Mobile and the Mississippi. A division of small boats was at Barataria. The *Lynx*, Lieutenant Madison, and the *Nonsuch*, Lieutenant Turner, were the only efficient sea-going craft under the commodore's command, and the former was lost during the summer, having foundered, so it was believed, in a hurricane.³⁴

Commodore Patterson reported two acts of piracy in September and before the end of the year nineteen additional cases were recorded. These vessels were robbed and the crews maltreated. Nearly all these outrages were committed about the West India Islands. One of the vessels, the ship *Orleans*, of Philadelphia, was seized off the Island of Abaco in the Bahamas, and detained two days, when the rising wind compelled the pirates to leave her in order to save their own vessel. They robbed her of goods to the value of forty thousand dollars and before leaving, the pirate chief addressed a note to a United States officer, a passenger on the *Orleans*. Signing the missive Richard Cœur de Lion, he says: "Between buccaneers no ceremony. I take your dry goods and in return I send you pimento; therefore we are now even—I entertain no resentment. . . . The goods of this world belong to the brave and valiant."³⁵

Not including vessels in the Mississippi, the naval

³³ *Porter*, 271; *Amer. State Papers, Naval*, I, 723.

³⁴ *Captains' Letters*, 1821, III, No. 46.

³⁵ *Captains' Letters*, 1821, IV, No. 77; *Niles*, Sept. 15, 22, Oct. 20, 1821.

force available for the suppression of piracy at the end of 1821 consisted of the sloop of war *Hornet*, 18, Commander Robert Henley; the 12-gun brigs *Enterprise* and *Spark*; the 12-gun schooners *Shark*, *Porpoise*, and *Grampus*; and three gunboats. Some captures were made by this little squadron. The *Enterprise*, Lieutenant Lawrence Kearney, rescued the ship *Lucies* from pirates off Cape San Antonio, the western end of Cuba, and took her into Havana. She was there given up to the authorities, after some dispute, when the Captain General agreed to make himself personally responsible for the amount of salvage due the *Enterprise*. At this time it was said there were eleven piratical vessels on the south coast of Cuba, cruising between Cape Maisi, the eastern point of the island, and Santiago. In October the *Hornet* captured a pirate schooner called the *Moscow*.³⁶

A private letter from Matanzas, Cuba, dated September 27, 1821, told a story of aggravated piracy: "Three American vessels . . . have been captured at the entrance of this harbor by a launch fitted out here and manned by nine villains, viz., one Portuguese, six Spaniards, and two Englishmen. They killed the captain and two men of the schooner and then ordered her to the northward. They murdered all the crew of the brig, opened their entrails, hanged them by the ribs to the masts, and afterwards set fire to the vessel and all were consumed! The sloop was more fortunate; the pirates contented themselves with severely beating the crew and plundering her of the most valuable articles on board. They then collected the combustibles and set them on fire and left her, hoping, as in the case of the brig, to consume the vessel and crew together, but these last, fortunately, had strength sufficient to take her long boat, and have safely got back to Matanzas."³⁷

No resistance seems to have been offered by the crews of any of these vessels. An occasional instance, however,

³⁶ *Officers' Letters*, 1821, LXIV, Nos. 58½, 68, 75½; *Logs of Hornet and Porpoise*; *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 804; *Niles*, November 10, December 29, 1821, January 5, 12, 1822.

³⁷ *Niles*, October 20, 1821.

helps to redeem the character of the merchant seaman for pugnacity. A month before these brutal murders the "schooner *Evergreen*, Isaac Pool captain, of Edgecomb, Maine, was captured by a piratical vessel. Soon thereafter the captain retook his schooner and made prisoners of the prize crew. Arrived in Boston, Mass., on September 22, 1821."³⁸

Captain Barnabas Lincoln sailed from Boston in the schooner *Exertion* in November, 1821, and a month later, near Cape Cruz, on the southern coast of Cuba, fell in with an armed schooner under the Mexican flag. Lincoln with his little crew of seven, all told, was obliged to surrender. After being robbed of everything, they were marooned on a desert island, from which they were later rescued.³⁹

³⁸ *Phil. Gazette*, October 7, 1821.

³⁹ *Narrative of Barnabas Lincoln*.

IV. THE WEST INDIA SQUADRON.

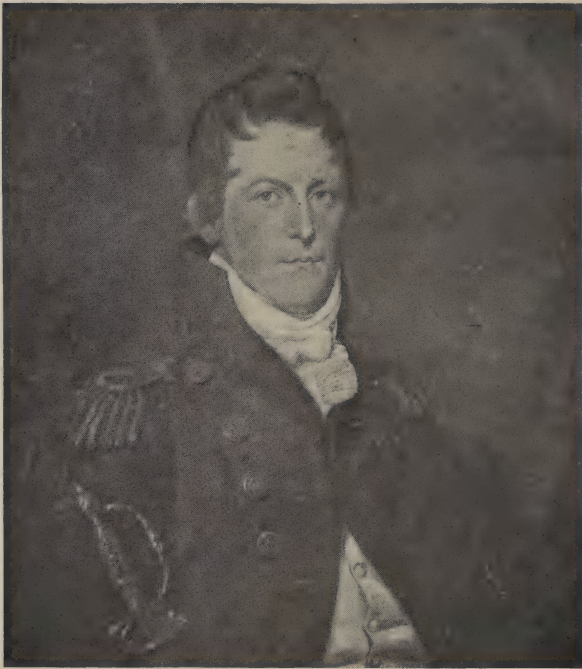
A strong naval force under the command of a competent officer was needed in the West Indies. "Anything less was a waste of time and effort, so far as the total extirpation of pirates was concerned. An occasional brush with them here and there was of no avail. For years this system had been pursued and under it piracy had flourished."⁴⁰ Commodore Patterson at New Orleans was too far away to exercise effective control.

The needs of the situation were becoming appreciated at Washington and in 1822 a force more nearly adequate, the West India squadron, was brought together and placed under the command of Captain James Biddle, in the 36-gun frigate *Macedonian*. The other vessels, which were added from time to time during the year, were the frigate *Congress*, 36; the corvettes *Cyane*, 32, and *John Adams*, 24; the 18-gun sloops of war *Hornet* and *Peacock*; the brigs *Spark* and *Enterprise*; schooners *Alligator*, *Grampus*, *Shark*, and *Porpoise*, the last six vessels mounting twelve guns each; and the gunboats *No. 158* and *No. 168*. Gunboat *No. 158* was also called the *Revenge*. The larger ships were restricted in their movements to deep water, but were of value through their moral influence and as mother ships to the small craft.

The presence of this force made evident to the local authorities in the West Indies that the United States had finally determined on the suppression of piracy. A larger number of light draft vessels would have greatly increased the efficiency of the squadron. A considerable number of supernumerary officers, for employment in boat expeditions and other special duty, accompanied the ships. The *Porpoise*, for instance, carried twenty-two lieutenants and six surgeon's mates.

Many piracies were committed early in the year 1822, but sometimes punishment followed. In January Cap-

⁴⁰ Goodrich (*Nav. Inst.*, XLIII, 91).



CAPTAIN JAMES BIDDLE

tain Elton, of the brig *Spark*, recaptured a Dutch sloop with seven pirates on board whom he brought into Charleston for trial. The schooner *Porpoise*, Lieutenant James Ramage, sailed from the Mississippi River in January, with a convoy. In his report Ramage says: "On the 15th, having seen the vessels bound to Havana and Matanzas safe to their destined ports, I made all sail to the westward and on the following day boarded the brig *Bolina*, of Boston, Gorham master. . . . On the day previous, his vessel was captured by pirates and robbed of every material they could carry away with them, at the same time treating the crew and himself with inhuman cruelty. After supplying him from this vessel with what necessaries he required, I made sail for the land and early the following morning. . . . I despatched our boats with forty men, under command of lieut. Curtis, in pursuit of these enemies of the human race. The boats having crossed the reef, which here extends a considerable distance from the shore, very soon discovered, chased, and captured a piratical schooner, the crew of which made their escape to the woods. Lieut. Curtis very judiciously manned the prize from our boats and proceeded about ten miles to leeward, where it was understood the principal depot of these marauders was established. This he fortunately discovered and attacked. A slight skirmish here took place but, as our force advanced, the opposing party precipitately retreated. We then took possession and burnt and destroyed their fleet consisting of five vessels, one of them a beautiful new schooner of about sixty tons, ready for sea with the exception of her sails. We also took three prisoners; the others fled to the woods. . . . I have manned one of the schooners taken, a very fine fast sailing vessel and keep her with me. She will prove of great service in my farther operations on this coast." These events took place on the north coast of Cuba, west of Bahia Honda.⁴¹

Commodore Biddle, who did not sail from Boston to join his squadron until March, arrived on the station

⁴¹ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 804; *Master Commandants' Letters*, 1822, No. 24.

somewhat later. Meanwhile Commodore Patterson continued to exercise command. He forwarded to the Navy Department a letter from Lieutenant Ramage telling of the destruction of four more piratical vessels and the taking of six prisoners.⁴²

On February 21, 1822, Commander Henley, of the sloop of war *Hornet*, then lying in Hampton Roads, wrote to Secretary Thompson that "the horrid system of piratical aggression and outrage, which has been so long carried on by those lawless men, notwithstanding our efforts to put a stop to it, seems to be increasing to a degree truly alarming to the mercantile interest and afflicting to humanity; and yet the authorities of the Island from which they mostly emanate, and whose inhabitants are the principal authors, look on with a calm, cold-blooded indifference and adopt no measures to suppress them. It was even said publicly at Havana that a number of villains who were known to be engaged in the piratical system had, upon hearing of our Navy's success in destroying some of their band, avowed their future intention to spare neither the lives or property of the Americans."⁴³

It is not unlikely that this letter had influence with Congress, then slowly becoming aroused. The Committee on Naval Affairs on March 2 made a report containing the following: "The extent, however, to which the system of plunder upon the ocean is carried on in the West India seas and Gulf of Mexico is truly alarming and calls imperiously for the prompt and efficient interposition of the General Government. Some fresh instance of the atrocity with which the pirates infesting those seas carry on their depredations, accompanied too by the indiscriminate massacre of the defenceless and unoffending, is brought by almost every mail, so that the intercourse between the northern and southern sections of the Union, by sea, is almost cut off. The committee are induced to believe that this system of piracy is now spreading itself to a vast extent, attracting to it the idle, vicious, and desperate of all nations and more particularly those who

⁴² *Captains' Letters*, 1822, IV, No. 15.

⁴³ *Master Commandants' Letters*, 1822, No. 17.

have heretofore been engaged in the slave trade, from which the vigilance of the American cruisers has driven them and that if they are not winked at by the authorities in the Island of Cuba, they are in no respect restrained by their interference."⁴⁴

The committee, stating that the *Hornet*, *Enterprise*, *Spark*, *Porpoise*, *Shark*, *Grampus*, and *Alligator*, as well as two gunboats, were already cruising "for the protection of trade, the suppression of piracy and traffic in slaves," resolved that the corvettes *Cyane* and *John Adams* and the sloops of war *Peacock* and *Erie* be added to the force. The *John Adams*, *Cyane*, and *Peacock* were sent later; presumably the *Erie* was not. The Committee also suggested employing the frigate *Constellation*.

Early in March the boats of the *Enterprise*, while chasing a large piratical barge, entered a creek near Cape San Antonio and captured two launches and four boats.⁴⁵ A day or two later, according to a contemporary "report which appears to be true, . . . the U. S. brig *Enterprise*, lieut. Kearney, captured eight sail of piratical vessels, whose united crews amounted to about 160 men. This must be pretty nearly a finishing stroke to the desperadoes. We have not lately heard of so many piratical acts, but cases are just published which happened in December last, in the capture of the brig *Exertion* and schooner *Constitution*, of Boston, that have caused no little feeling. The vessels that seized them were partly manned by the twenty-one wretches who were recently tried and condemned as pirates at New Orleans and pardoned by the president of the United States—they boasted of it; and in thirty days from the time of their liberation were at their old trade, with a resolution to murder all their prisoners. But instead of this, they were so humane as to put their prisoners ashore on a low sand key, to perish for want of water or to be swept away by the sea."⁴⁶

The Cuban government, apparently beginning to feel the disgrace of their island being used as a base of opera-

⁴⁴ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 787.

⁴⁵ *Captains' Letters*, 1822, IV, No. 58.

⁴⁶ *Niles*, April 6, 1822.

tions for criminals, made a few raids on the nest of pirates at Cape San Antonio. Six were killed and two of the prisoners taken were tried, convicted and shot. But it was evident that public opinion and the interests of some leading citizens were with the outlaws.⁴⁷

It was announced in *Niles' Register*, March 2, that "the frigate *Macedonian*, Captain Biddle, is about to sail from Boston with four smaller vessels and two hundred marines, with instructions, it is said, to sweep the land as well as the sea of the pirates of Cuba." One of the first acts of the new commodore, after his arrival on the station, was to address a communication to the Governor and Captain General of Cuba, Don Nicholas Mahy. This was dated on board the *Macedonian* in Havana harbor, April 30, 1822, and represented that the commercial intercourse between the two countries, already considerable and mutually beneficial, must be encouraged and protected. "For this object the Government of the United States on its part has employed an adequate naval force, which is placed under my direction and control. But as the depredations have been committed chiefly in open boats, immediately upon the coast and off the harbors, it is important that we should have your excellency's co-operation. I have therefore the honor to propose that your excellency should so far co-operate with me as to sanction the landing upon the coast of Cuba of our boats and men, when in pursuit of pirates. This measure would be promotive of our common benefit, is indispensable to the entire suppression of piracy, and is not intended in any manner to infringe upon the territorial rights of your excellency."⁴⁸

In reply the governor professed a desire to cultivate commercial intercourse, the importance of which he fully appreciated; also a desire to co-operate in the "extermination of those enemies who under all colors have laid waste and committed robberies." But "with respect to the permission you solicit for landing upon this coast with troops and people in boats, for the purpose of pursuing those

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, March 23, 1822.

⁴⁸ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 805.

pirates, I cannot and must not consent to it. I repeat, that the necessary measures have been adopted to defend my territorial jurisdiction and for the apprehension of every description of outlaws." The governor's efforts, however, to enforce the "necessary measures" were not marked with requisite zeal and energy. Commodore Biddle thought it best to drop the subject of co-operation for the time being, but hoped the governor would eventually be brought to consent. As he wrote to Secretary Thompson a few days later, "He certainly ought, and perhaps will, consent to our landing upon those parts of the Coast that are uninhabited and where, tho' within his jurisdiction, he is utterly incapable of exercising any authority. There are many such places on the coast of this island."⁴⁹

Meanwhile the small vessels of the squadron were doing the best that could be done under the circumstances. Lieutenants Stockton in the *Alligator*, Gregory in the *Grampus*, and Perry in the *Shark* were especially active. Several prizes were taken, some of which were brought in and some destroyed. Nevertheless, the system continued to thrive. "There is no sort of doubt but that the pirates are encouraged and protected by certain of the authorities in Cuba, especially by the governor of Holguin, with whom a correspondence was held which will probably be published. Plundered goods were publicly brought in and sold at Xibara [Gibara] and lieutenant Stockton was hardly restrained, by his positive instructions, from settling the account with the commandant and people of that place. It appears that the famous Lafitte is at the head of some of those parties, that their business is increasing, that they often murder whole crews."⁵⁰

The brig *Belvidere*, of Beverly, Captain Z. G. Lamson, bound from Port au Prince to New Orleans, was chased by a schooner on May 2, 1822. Twenty-two men were counted on her. After firing once or twice she "hoisted a red flag with death's head and cross under it." She

⁴⁹ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 805; *Captains' Letters*, 1822, IV, No. 79 (May 6).

⁵⁰ *Niles*, June 1, 22, 1822.

ran alongside the *Belvidere* and her commander ordered Captain Lamson to send his boat on board. "He had not discovered our gun at that time," says Lamson's account of the affair. "I told him I would send her directly; he immediately gave me a whole volley of musketry and blunderbusses. . . . Our gun was pointed and cloth removed and we commenced as smart a fire as possible with our 24-pound carronade, four muskets and seven pistols, and on our first fire six of them were seen to fall, the captain among them. . . . He only discharged his long gun three times alongside, as our third shot broke his carriage and his gun fell into the lee scupper. He then kept up as sharp a fire as he was able with muskets and blunderbusses and dropped near the stern, expecting to find more comfortable quarters, but there he got a most terrible cutting up from a brass 3-pounder by which he was raked within twenty yards distance with a round and two bags of forty musket balls each, which completely fixed him. . . . His vessel holding such a wind and sailing so fast, she was soon clear of grapeshot range and wore ship, when we counted six or seven of them, which appeared to be all that was left; the captain I saw distinctly laid on deck. Our loss was one man killed, shot through the head."⁵¹

A British merchant seaman, Aaron Smith, who had been captured by a Cuban pirate in 1822 and forced to serve as navigator, relates his experiences. One day, while lying in port, "I perceived a number of boats and canoes pulling towards the corsair, and the captain told me that he expected a great deal of company from the shore and among others two or three magistrates and their families and some priests, observing also that I should see several pretty Spanish girls. I remarked that I wondered he was not afraid of the magistrates. He laughed and said I did not know the Spanish character. 'Presents of coffee and other little things,' he said, 'will always ensure their friendship, and from them I receive intelligence of all that occurs at the Havannah and know every

⁵¹ *Essex Institute Historical Coll.*, October, 1922.

hostile measure, time enough to guard against it.' Two magistrates, a priest, and several ladies and gentlemen now came on board and were received in great pomp by the captain, whom they congratulated on his success."⁵²

The Jamaica sloop *Blessing*, William Smith, master, was homeward bound from Santiago, Cuba, in July, 1822, according to the sworn statement of her mate, when she fell in with a long, black schooner called the *Emanuel* "and commanded by a white man with a mixed crew of color and countries, among whom were English and American; that after bringing the sloop to, the pirates' boat came alongside and took out the captain and his son, with all the crew, and carried them on board of the schooner, leaving the sloop in possession of his people; that he demanded of the captain his money or his life. The captain persisted that he had none, but proffered him the cargo. . . . On the following day, not producing any money, a plank was run out in the starboard side of the schooner, upon which he made Captain Smith walk, and that as he approached to the end, they tilted the plank, when he dropped into the sea, and there, when in the effort of swimming, the captain called for his musket and fired at him therewith, when he sunk and was seen no more. The rest of the crew were ironed below, with the exception of his son, a boy about fourteen, who witnessed the fate of his father. In the agony of tears and crying, the captain took the butt end of the musket and knocked the boy on the head, thereafter took him by the foot and hove him overboard." The next day everything of value was taken from the *Blessing* and she was burned. The crew were set adrift in a boat and were soon picked up by a passing schooner.⁵³

In August 1822 the schooner *Bee*, Captain Johnson, of Charleston, South Carolina, was captured by pirates. "They kept possession of the *Bee* nine days, during which time they took some of the cargo on shore and sold it. They compelled capt. Johnson and his crew to throw the ballast out of the hold of the piratical schooner to make

⁵² *Atrocities of the Pirates*, 38.

⁵³ *Niles*, October 5, 1822.

room to receive the cargo of the *Bee* and beat him with a rope's end when he did not work to suit them. At one time they beat him with a cutlass. . . . At length they concluded to set captain Johnson, the passenger and his crew [except one] . . . adrift in an old leaky boat which they had taken from some fishermen on shore, and burn the schooner *Bee*, which they did. After being thus exposed for five days in an open boat, with one whole and one broken oar, they reached Matanzas." In this case the pirate captain was afterwards arrested in New York, tried, convicted, and sentenced to be hanged, but was pardoned by the President of the United States. This was in 1824.⁵⁴

Lieutenant Gregory, of the *Grampus*, reported to the commodore his arrival "at St. Bartholomew on the 2d of August, and sailed again on the 7th with convoy for St. Thomas. On the morning of the 9th fell in with two Spanish cruisers of Tortola who demanded permission and claimed the right to board the convoy, which being peremptorily refused, they hauled off. The same day I arrived at St. Thomas and received from Captain John Souther of the schooner *Coquette*, of Georgetown, D. C., the enclosed deposition, having been plundered by those vessels. On the 14th I left St. Thomas with two valuable vessels bound to Curaçoa, and on the evening of the 15th saw an hermaphrodite brig hovering upon our weather quarter, apparently a cruiser; continued my course without regarding her. At daylight made her ahead and gave chase; at half-past nine, having gained considerably upon her, she hoisted English colors, changed them to Spanish at ten and fired a gun to windward, and at half-past ten hove to and set a white flag at the fore. On nearing her I perceived her to be the pirate that had fired upon and plundered the *Coquette* and therefore considered it my duty to arrest her. At twenty minutes past eleven the *Grampus* was laid under her lee within pistol shot and her surrender demanded as a pirate, which she affected not to understand and answered me to that import.

⁵⁴ *N. Y. Evening Post*, April 30, May 3, June 4, 1824.

“While repeating the demand he poured into us a full volley from his small arms and cannon, which was instantly returned and continued three minutes and a half, when he struck his colors, a complete wreck, having one man killed and six wounded and in a sinking condition. The boats were despatched instantly to their relief and it was only owing to the great exertions of Lieutenant Voorhies that she was prevented from going down, having received three shot between wind and water, one of which injured the pumps. The *Grampus* received some trifling injury in her sails and rigging, but not a man hurt.

“The captured vessel proved to be the notorious privateer *Palmyra*, formerly the *Pancheta*, from Porto Rico; carries one long brass 18 and eight 18-pound carronades, and a crew of eighty-eight men. They acknowledged the robbery of the *Coquette* and the only excuse given by the officer is that they could not prevent those things happening now and then. Several of the plundered articles were found on board.”⁵⁵

In the late summer of 1822 the centre of piratical activity shifted temporarily to Porto Rico. Lieutenant Gregory, while at St. Thomas, was informed by Porto Ricans whom he met there, that on their island privateers were being fitted out, largely manned by Cubans, which were in reality nothing but pirates, and that serious depredations on commerce were to be expected. In their sentiment towards Americans the Cubans were actuated by “a deadly desire of revenge.”⁵⁶

In August Captain Robert T. Spence, with the ship *Cyane*, was at San Juan, Porto Rico, and opened a correspondence with the Governor, Don Francisco Gonzalez de Linarez, concerning captures of American merchant-

⁵⁵ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 193.

⁵⁶ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 193.

men by Porto Rican privateers. In his letter of the 28th he says: "It appears that some of these vessels have been sent in and after a grievous detention, declared to be a 'bad prize'; subject, however, to pay all the costs of suit and one-third of the expenses of the privateer. . . . A pretended violation of blockade, it appears, is the pretext for sending into the ports of this island vessels navigating the sea under the American flag. The whole therefore may be resolved into two descriptions of cases: The first comprising vessels seized and again released as 'bad prizes,' paying the whole of the costs of trial and a portion of the expenses of the privateer.

"The principles of equity applicable to such cases are too simple to require exposition. The innocent are not to pay the penalty of another's guilt or imprudence. If an American is interrupted in her voyage, captured and vexatiously detained until a judicial investigation determines her to be a 'bad prize,' it seems to me self evident that all costs of the suit should be paid by the captors, in whom the wrong is; add to this that proper damages should be levied on the aggressor, that the sufferer may be fairly indemnified, and the 'privateersman' may be restrained in future by a fear of being, in all similar cases, called upon to make good the injury resulting from his wantonness. Without such a check what is there to limit the mischief done by men of this order who, stealing from their dens and lurking places, pollute the ocean with the blood of defenseless sailors and gorge their cupidity with the spoils of plunder and ravage? . . .

"The second description of cases to which I wish to call the immediate attention of your excellency, are those vessels sent in under a pretext of attempting to enter a blockaded port. The pacific policy uniformly pursued by the government of the United States, the just and liberal principles by which it has been governed through all its various struggles, to treat all nations as friends and especially to be on the most friendly footing with Spain, entitle the citizens of America to the privilege of navigating the seas without molestation on pretexts so flimsy

as those of violating a 'blockade' which has never existed *de facto*. . . .

"Your excellency, influenced by high and honorable motives, will doubtless see the propriety of ordering all American vessels now detained to be forthwith released, and the punishment of marauders who have tarnished the dignity of the Spanish character by acts of inhuman treatment to citizens of the United States by the most flagrant outrages, by a prostration of all the usages of civilized society; thereby bringing the commercial world into a state truly to be deplored, tending to arm man against his brother man and to make safety nowhere but in strength and habitual hostility."⁵⁷

Captain Spence a few days later wrote to the Secretary of the Navy: "I have had a conversation with the governor who begs me to be assured that all he can do shall be done to meet my wishes, in relation to the privateers fitted out of the island; that those already out were equipped before he assumed the government; that he is opposed to it, both in his private and public capacity; that future restraints shall be placed upon them; and that he will remedy all abuses, as far as he has power. . . . That upon the subject of blockade he can do nothing—it was a question that must be settled between the two governments; that blockade had been declared by General Morillo; it was recognized and the consequences of violating it were inevitable. Over this question he had no control."⁵⁸

The privateers fitted out at Porto Rico consisted of six brigs and schooners, at least three of which were of considerable force; with three or four small vessels in addition. At the time of Captain Spence's arrival they had sent five American vessels into port, a barque and four brigs.

The *Peacock*, Captain Stephen Cassin, captured a pirate off Bahia Honda, about sixty miles west of Havana, September 28. On boarding her, arms and ammunition

⁵⁷ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 196.

⁵⁸ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 203 (September 5, 1822). For the whole correspondence, see pp. 195-203.

were found on board, and a crew of eighteen men. "She had no permit for arms and in the roll of equipage produced (which was without a signature) but ten persons were specified. We also found on board a red Ensign and Pendant. Conceiving her piratical character plainly evidenced by these circumstances, I took her as a prize and sent on board Midn. Thos. Dornin with a crew. In the afternoon of the same day I spoke H. B. M. Schooner *Speedwell*, Capt. Gerry, who informed me that a few hours previously he was fired at by two schooners under the red flag, which he chased in as far as he could with safety venture with his vessel. I immediately got out the boats and dispatched them with about fifty men well armed and the revenue cutter [*Louisiana*] and prize schooner in pursuit of them, but after a vigilant search among the Keys they returned to the ship the following evening without success. The following morning, discovering a sail inshore, I again sent the boats. . . . The *Speedwell* also joined the expedition, and it is with pleasure I mention the politeness of Captain Gerry in tendering any assistance that his vessel could afford. The following morning they returned to the ship with four schooners they had taken as prizes."⁵⁹

The story of "A Desperate Fight" between a merchantman, that dared to resist, and a pirate, was first told in a New Orleans paper. "The brig *Patriot*, of New York, Horace T. Jacobs, master, on her voyage from Port au Prince to New Orleans, on the 7th of September, being off Cape [San] Antonio and in a dead calm, was attacked by a piratical schooner of about 60 tons, with a crew of from 45 to 60 men. . . . Capt. Jacobs then tacked to the south and eastward and hauled up the course and ordered preparations to be made for action, which were readily and unanimously obeyed; the universal good spirits which pervaded all hands—consisting of ten men and a boy—were truly conspicuous. When the schooner was close under the stern, Capt. Jacobs hailed her, upon which she fired a whole volley of musketry into the brig, and

⁵⁹ *Master Commandants' Letters*, 1822, No. 166; Log of the *Peacock*.

we in return commenced upon the schooner by firing the stern gun, which was under the direction of Mr. Johnson, the chief mate, which, with the musketry, did great execution amongst them. This gun was, however, dismounted the third round and our colors were shot away at the same time, upon which the schooner set up a terrible shout to board from the bowsprit end; her boarders were covered by an abundance of musketry, but notwithstanding their vast superiority they were very gallantly repulsed. She then set fire to the brig astern by throwing fired wads in at the cabin windows and into the stern boat, which was happily extinguished without damage. She then made another attempt to board, but was equally unsuccessful. By this time her fire considerably abated and we could perceive an almost clear deck on board of her, and that she manifested a willingness to get clear of us. She asked for quarter repeatedly, but it was suspected to be a trick . . . to get sight of the people and knock them off. She had much difficulty in getting clear of the brig, as her jibboom and some of her ropes forward had got foul of the brig's davit and the stern boat's bow. Seven men could only be counted on her deck with the glass when she was half a mile off. The brig's rigging and sails are very much cut up. Capt. Jacobs was wounded in the head by a musket ball and is supposed to have fractured his skull. He died of a lockjaw and violent convulsive fits on the night of the 12th inst. He has left a wife, who was on board in the action, to lament his loss; he had only been married a little more than three months. Mr. Johnson . . . is the only surviving officer of the brig and was wounded in the thigh by a musket ball; he is much to be praised for his good and persevering conduct. Mr. J. D. Walker, of New York, doing second mate's duty, was killed in the action."⁶⁰

The Cuban authorities seemed to be wholly unconcerned as to the crimes committed in their immediate neighborhood, and made no effort to prevent them or to punish the perpetrators. It was well known that the pirates maintained a base of operations at Regla, in the harbor of

⁶⁰ *Niles*, November 2, 1822.

Havana, and made captures within sight of the Moro.⁶¹

In November, 1822, while the U. S. schooner *Alligator* was at anchor in Matanzas harbor, her commander, Lieutenant William H. Allen, was informed that an American brig and schooner had been captured recently and were then lying in a bay forty or fifty miles to the eastward. The *Alligator* got under way, and the next morning at daylight anchored near the bay. The brig and schooner, with three other vessels—a ship, brig, and schooner—were seen at anchor; also a schooner under sail and full of men, with boats passing between her and the other vessels. The *Alligator's* boats were immediately manned and sent in chase. The schooner tried to escape with sweeps. After a long chase, the boats came within gunshot. The schooner hoisted a red flag, and opened fire; the boats prepared to board. A second schooner then appeared and opened fire on the boats. The men in the first schooner left her in boats, attempting to get aboard the other. The launch of the *Alligator*, with Lieutenant Allen, and her cutter then tried to head off the pirate boats, which returned to their schooner. The Americans made another attempt to board this vessel, when her crew again took to their boats and got aboard the other schooner. The Americans then took possession of the first schooner and the boats chased the second schooner. The combined pirate crews on board her numbered about one hundred. The American boats were repulsed with a loss of two killed and five wounded. Among the latter was Lieutenant Allen, who, with one other, died soon afterwards. The pirates were joined by a third schooner. It was learned later that their loss was fourteen killed and a great number wounded. The Americans brought away their prize, also the ship, two brigs, and two schooners.⁶²

The brig *Marcia*, of Providence, and schooner *Camden*, of Boston, were off Cape San Antonio, December 7, early in the morning, when, says Captain Thurber of the brig, they “saw two piratical cruisers coming out from under the land. At 7 they came alongside and directly came

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, October 26, 1822.

⁶² *Niles*, December 7, 1822, February 1, 1823.

on board armed with knives, swords, dirks, and pistols, and took possession of both vessels, put the brig about and steered for the land, with the avowed intention of burning her and killing all hands. They began beating me with their swords and thrusting their daggers at me, threatening to stab me. They broke open chests and trunks, the cabin and every part of the vessel, and beat all hands fore and aft, to make them confess where the money was, conducting more like demons in human shape than men. They rigged themselves out in our clothes and strutted about the decks, flourishing their swords, etc. After ravaging about two hours and being satisfied there was no more money on board, they bid us go about our business, taking 75 dollars, small boats, oars, rigging, sails, and everything they thought of value. . . . They had two English lads to pull their boats, who informed my men that they belonged to the British brig *Union*, which the pirates had burnt and murdered all hands except them. The piratical vessels were of about 40 tons, crews chiefly Spaniards of a most savage appearance and conduct.”⁶³

On December 11, 1822, Secretary Thompson reported to the Chairman of the Senate Naval Committee that in the opinion of the Navy Commissioners a considerable force, in addition to that already employed, was necessary. He recommended: “One Steam Boat, of 90 to 20 tons, to carry two 18-pounders and two 12-pounders upon traveling carriages, so as to fire from any part of the vessel. Ten fast sailing Schooners, of 45 to 60 tons burthen, to draw not more than five to seven feet water, each to be armed with one long 12 or 18-pounder mounted on a circle, with two 12-pounder carronades, with the necessary number of small arms, to row from 20 to 24 sweeps; and five light, double bank Cutters, each to row 20 oars and adapted to carry 40 men well armed with muskets, pistols, boarding pikes, cutlasses, etc.” This additional force was provided by an act approved December 20.⁶⁴

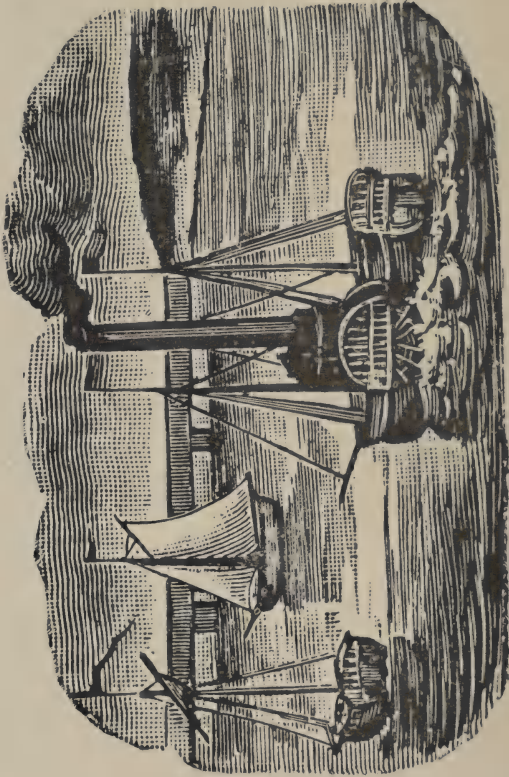
“Our vessels operating in the West Indies were engaged

⁶³ *Phil. Aurora*, February 13, 1823.

⁶⁴ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 822.

upon no holiday task. Much of the work was done in open boats, absent from the parent ship for days at a time, searching out lagoons and other hidden resorts of pirates. The crews were not only exposed to hostile gun-fire and to the vicissitudes of the weather, but also to the infection of paludal and yellow fevers. The latter, indeed, was the worst enemy they had to encounter, its victims outnumbering many fold those who fell in action. At one moment it seemed as if yellow jack would drive our naval vessels altogether out of West Indian waters. In comparison with this ever-present danger, the discomforts and risks inseparable from boat expeditions were as naught. It speaks volumes for the spirit of the navy of those days that its officers and men faced this insidious, invisible peril without a murmur, if not without apprehension. To stand up in battle against a human foe, giving and receiving the blows of actual combat, is a far lighter undertaking than to confront the mysterious, unseen chance of being mortally stricken while unable to ward off the assaults of a dread disease. All honor to those who so bravely did their duty under appalling conditions."⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Goodrich (*Nav. Inst.*, XLIII, 493).



U. S. STEAMER "SEA GULL "

Second Steamer in the U. S. Navy, 1823

From the seal of the Connecticut River Banking Company

Kindness of L. F. Middlebrook, Esq.

V. COMMODORE PORTER.

A new commander-in-chief of the West Indian station was selected early in 1823. This was Captain David Porter, who, since he relinquished his command at New Orleans, had added to his credit, already considerable, his brilliant achievements in the War of 1812. The additional force provided for him consisted of a steam galliot called the *Sea Gull*, eight schooners armed with three guns each, five 20-oared barges, and a transport mounting six guns. The *Sea Gull* was the first naval steamer of any country to serve in time of war. Most of the vessels already in the West Indies in 1822 remained there under his orders. The *Alligator* had been wrecked and the *Non-such* sent to the Mediterranean.

Porter's orders from Secretary Thompson, dated February 1, 1823, define the attitude of the Administration towards conditions in the West Indies at this time. He was told that he had been appointed to the command of a squadron "for the purpose of repressing piracy and affording effectual protection to the citizens and commerce of the United States." He was also to give his attention to the suppression of the slave-trade according to the provisions of several acts of Congress. While doing these things he must "observe the utmost caution not to encroach upon the rights of others." Pirates being the enemies of all nations, he might land on the islands and pursue them, even in the settled parts, having previously, however, given notice to the local authorities that his sole object was to seize the offenders and bring them to justice. Any pirates captured on shore must be turned over to the local authorities, but if the authorities should refuse to receive them, they must be kept on shipboard and a report of the circumstances made at once to the Navy Department.⁶⁶ When, two years later, Porter came into collision with the

⁶⁶ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 203. See Appendix IV. For Commodore Porter's General Instructions to his officers, dated February 26, 1823, see *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 235.

Department, he claimed these orders as justification of his conduct.

Porter established his headquarters at Key West, at that time called Thompson's Island, or Allenton. That place, however, was not his first objective. He sailed from Hampton Roads February 15, 1823, on the sloop of war *Peacock*, Commander Stephen Cassin, accompanied by the *Sea Gull*, the schooner *Decoy*, transport, and the schooners *Greyhound*, *Shark*, *Ferret*, *Jackall*, *Fox*, *Wild Cat*, *Terrier*, *Weasel*, and *Beagle*. The barges were not ready for sea. On March 3 the Commodore announced to Secretary Thompson his arrival that morning at St. Thomas "with all the squadron under my command, except the *Grey Hound*, which vessel separated in a gale. I have despatched Lieutenant Commandant Perry, with the *Shark* and three small schooners, to scour the south side of Porto Rico, and shall sail tomorrow with the rest of the squadron for St. John's, where I have been informed several privateers have been fitted out which have done considerable injury to our commerce. I am also informed that there is a large British naval force in those seas, a squadron of which, apparently on the lookout, I fell in with this morning."⁶⁷

Porter left St. Thomas the day after his arrival, soon fell in with the schooner *Greyhound*, Commander John Porter, and sent her into San Juan, Porto Rico, with a letter to the governor, Don Miguel de Torres. In this letter, dated March 4, the commodore requested the governor to furnish him "a descriptive list of vessels legally commissioned to cruise from Porto Rico," that he might "know how and when to respect them." He also wished to know how far the Porto Rico privateers had been "instructed to interrupt our trade with Mexico and the Colombian Republic." The co-operation of the governor in the suppression of piracy was hoped for and expected.⁶⁸

On the 6th, the *Greyhound* not having returned, the *Fox*, Lieutenant William H. Cocke, was sent in "to obtain intelligence of Captain Porter as to his progress." When

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 222.

⁶⁸ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 278.

the *Fox* entered the harbor of San Juan she was fired upon and Lieutenant Cocks was killed. The officer in command of the battery, who gave the order to fire, claimed to be acting under orders of the governor to permit no vessel to enter the harbor. Meanwhile the Commodore had proceeded to Aguadilla, at the western end of the island, where, on March 10, he was joined by the schooners, including the *Shark*, which was at once sent to the coast of South America. At this time he says: "I also divided my squadron into Four Divisions, giving one to the command of Captain Porter, one to Lieut. Comdt. Kearney, one to Lieut. Comdt. Watson, and keeping one with myself, with orders to proceed by different routes to Thompson's Island, thus multiplying our chances of detecting Pirates."⁶⁹

Upon being informed of Lieutenant Cocks's death, Commodore Porter issued a general order, dated March 10, 1823. "The afflicting intelligence which has this day been received, relative to the death of that most excellent officer and man, Lieut. Comdt. William H. Cocks, by a shot fired from the castle of St. John's, has filled us all with the most lively sorrow and regret. Had he fallen in battle, had he died by the hands of declared enemies, our sorrows would have been assuaged by a knowledge of his having died in defence of the rights of his country and while doing his duty as an officer. But to be thus cruelly torn from his family, his friends, and from his country, by the conduct of a dastard (whose aim was rendered more sure by his perfect safety and by the helpless condition of the vessel of our lamented friend), is heart-rending in the extreme. But, while we deprecate the act of the individual who committed it, we must not involve in it the conduct of a whole people. The authorities of Porto Rico and in particular the captain general of the island has given the most unequivocal proof of the most sincere regret that the event has taken place. Everything has been done by him that I could reasonably expect him

⁶⁹ *Captains' Letters*, 1823, I, No. 97 (March 14); *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 1103, 1105. For Porter's correspondence with the Governor of Porto Rico, see pp. 1103-1106.

to do at present, to satisfy me of his friendly disposition towards us, and as no act of ours can recall to life the estimable man who has been taken from us, we must leave what remains yet to be done to our country, whose demands will no doubt be prompt and effectual. All that remains for us to do is to grieve, and as a slight token of what we feel, it is proposed to wear crape on the left arm and on the swords for one month."⁷⁰

The next port made was Matanzas. Writing to the Secretary, March 28, the Commodore announced his arrival at that place two days earlier, "after giving the North Coasts of St. Domingo and Cuba as thorough an examination as was practicable with the two Schooners and the Boats of this ship with the greater part of her crew, while all the Keys off shore, pointed out to me as the rendezvous of Pirates were examined by the Ship. The service has been very fatiguing to those employed for more than a week past in open boats and in the most dangerous and intricate navigation in the World, but it has been performed cheerfully and I wish I could say successfully; but we have not in this long route been able to detect a Single Pirate, although our suspicions rested on many, nor can I conceive how we shall ever be able to detect them, for they are one day fishermen, another droguers, wood cutters, salt gatherers, or Pirates, as best suits them. Every Spaniard is armed with a knife and this weapon according to their mode of warfare is enough for them. Were we to apprehend every suspicious Spaniard and Vessel, their coasting trade would soon be entirely broken up.

"Since my arrival here I have heard of the most horrid atrocities committed by them. They now spare no one, whole Ship Crews are indiscriminately burnt with their vessels, and there has been an instance recently of the murder of a crew under the walls of the Morro. . . . Five piratical Vessels have for some Weeks been watching the fleet in the Bay, which I shall cause to be examined, and since our arrival, . . . they have dispersed and disarmed. . . .

⁷⁰ *Niles*, April 19, 1823.

"I was surprised to learn on my arrival here that circulars had been written by the Captain General to the Governors and Commanders of the different districts of the Island, forbidding the entrance of my squadron into any of its ports or the landing of any part of my forces in pursuit of Pirates. The Island appears at Present in a very agitated state and the Government appears to think that the United States would consider it a very desirable acquisition. I shall use every means in my power to satisfy them that my objects are totally unconnected with anything of a Political nature."⁷¹

About this time a case of successful resistance by a merchantman to a piratical attack was reported. "The brig *Bowdoin*, Captain Carr, has arrived at Newport, R. I., from Matanzas. Four hours after leaving the latter, Captain C. was approached by a piratical schooner from the land and full of men, rowing fourteen sweeps. On coming up, they hoisted the red flag and called upon Captain C. to strike or die. He was not quite willing to do either, but waited until the scoundrels arrived within range, when he let loose at them four carriage guns and a number of muskets. The deck of the schooner was completely raked and she instantly hauled off with all possible speed, rowing, however, only three sweeps instead of fourteen. Captain C. supposes he might easily have sunk the pirates, had it not been calm, which enabled them to escape."⁷²

"It is evident that Porter's business was not to be facilitated by the Spanish authorities, upon whom must rest the responsibility for the long continuance of piratical depredations. After making all due allowance for the admitted claim to proper recognition of their dignity, there still remains the conviction that either through complicity or punctilio, they refrained from doing for themselves, or permitting others to do in their stead, what was imperatively necessary to put a stop to the nefarious traffic with its accompaniment of cruelty and murder."⁷³

⁷¹ *Captains' Letters*, 1823, I, No. 122; *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 1106, II, 222.

⁷² *Niles*, March 8, 1823.

⁷³ Goodrich (*Nar. Inst.*, XLIII, 685).

Early in April, 1823, Lieutenant Cornelius K. Stribling, of the *Peacock*, with two of the heavy barges, the *Gallinipper* and *Mosquito*, chased a schooner ashore about twenty miles east of Havana, after a running fight of over an hour. The schooner fought under Spanish colors. She was called the *Pilot*, and came originally from Norfolk. After beaching their vessel, most of the pirates escaped in the bushes, but two were killed and several wounded. One prisoner was taken. No American was hurt. The victors succeeded in getting the schooner off practically uninjured and brought her to Havana.⁷⁴

Just about this time it was stated, apparently on good authority, that since the cessation of hostilities in 1815, over three thousand acts of piracy had been committed. The report mentioned by Commodore Porter, that the governor of Cuba had given order to local governors and commandants of districts, forbidding the entrance of American vessels into Cuban ports, was denied. It originated with certain of these commandants, who made much trouble for the Commodore and his officers.⁷⁵

When Commodore Porter arrived at Matanzas in March, he found a fleet of merchantmen waiting for convoy, and he was able to give them protection. He remained at Matanzas and vicinity for about a month. In April he shifted his flag to the steamer *Sea Gull*. After a two days' search for "three piratical schooners in the River Palmas," he "found the remains of the vessels, which the Pirates had burnt."⁷⁶

Captain Cassin of the *Peacock*, in a report to the commodore dated April 28, after mentioning the capture of the schooner *Pilot*, and of a sloop on the 16th, says: "At 10 A. M. on the same day we anchored in a noted harbor for pirates, intending to examine it thoroughly. Our anchor was scarcely gone, before a felucca was discovered standing out for the *Gallinipper*, who was ahead, sounding. On opening our vessels she immediately hauled down her sails and pulled around the point of an island.

⁷⁴ *Officers' Letters*, 1823, III, No. 16; *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 1109.

⁷⁵ *Niles*, April 19, June 14, 1823.

⁷⁶ *Captains' Letters*, 1823, II, No. 50.

The barges were ordered in chase, accompanied by all the boats we could muster. On their getting to where the felucca had disappeared, several houses were discovered and a number of men employed carrying things from them and, at the moment, were supposed to be fishermen. It was some time before the felucca was discovered and, when found, was dismantled and covered with bushes, hastily thrown over.

"When the pirates (which they proved to be) found she was discovered, they fired a volley of musketry at our boat, which fortunately proved harmless. The officers and crews immediately landed and pursued them through the bushes, when a running fight of more than half a mile took place, the pirates frequently turning for a moment and firing, which was returned occasionally but without effect, from the eagerness with which they were pursued. So closely were they pressed that they threw off shoes, clothes, and other incumbrances; but from the thickness of the bushes and knowledge of their path, all made their escape. Their establishment, which consisted of five houses, was set on fire and the felucca brought off. She is a fine boat, coppered, pulls sixteen sweeps, and is in every respect equal to any of our barges. She appears to have been recently fitted and I presume was on the eve of making her first cruise. The old boat, which was taken in the morning, I gave to a fisherman who was serviceable to us as a pilot, she being an incumbrance."⁷⁷

After this the north shore of western Cuba was minutely examined, which occupied four days. The water was very shallow and the passage within the Colorados Reef extremely intricate. Cassin learned that several British vessels were cruising in the vicinity. He arrived at Cape San Antonio April 21, and later proceeded to Key West.

Commodore Porter, still on the *Sea Gull*, but now at Key West, wrote to Secretary Thompson May 10. After reporting the events just related, he goes on: "I shall dispatch the *Peacock* today for La Vera Cruz to relieve the *Shark* and shall now be left with only my small ves-

⁷⁷ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, 1110.

sels, two of which, with two borges (which I have found great difficulty in manning from the *Sea Gull* and Store Ship) I shall send off this evening under the command of Lieut. Comdt. Watson on an expedition among the Keys in the old Straights [Old Bahama Channel] and thence around the Island, to return by way of Cape Antonio. Two schooners under Lieut. Comdt. Rose are making the circuit by the other route, commencing at Point Yeacos, going round Cape Antonio and returning by the Old Straights; two under command of Lieut. Comdt. Skinner are convoying from Havana; and the remaining two are careening and will in a few days sail for the protection of our commerce; and the three remaining barges are hauled up for want of men. When I left Matanzas, the country was alarmed by large bands of robbers, well mounted and armed, who had plundered several estates and committed some murders in the neighborhood of the city. Bodies of horse had been sent in pursuit of them and the militia were all under arms. Some prisoners had been taken and it was said that those bands were composed of the freebooters which lately infested the coast and who, being compelled to abandon the ocean, had taken up this new line of business.⁷⁸

The scene now changes to the Gulf of Campeche. On April 15 Commodore Patterson ordered Lieutenant Gregory in the *Grampus*, then at New Orleans, to proceed to that place in order to chastise pirates who had attacked the American brig *Belisarius*, of Kennebunk. It is not quite clear why the *Grampus*, presumably in Porter's squadron, should have been under the orders of Patterson. On March 1 the *Belisarius*, while on a voyage from Port au Prince to Campeche, "was boarded off the harbor of the latter by a piratical schooner of about forty tons and manned by thirty or forty men, who asked for money, but the captain (Perkins) denied having any.

⁷⁸ *Captains' Letters*, 1823, II, No. 97; *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 1109.

They then stabbed him in several places and cut off one of his arms, when he told them where the money was (200 doubloons), which they took and proceeded to murder him in the most inhuman manner. He was first deprived of the other arm and one of his legs. They then dipped oakum in oil, put some in his mouth and under him, set it on fire, and thus terminated his sufferings. The mate was stabbed with a sabre in the thigh. They also robbed the brig of anchors and cables, sails, rigging, quadrants, charts, books, papers, and nearly all the provisions and water. On the passage from Campeachy to the Balize she was providentially supplied with provisions, etc., by several vessels which she fell in with, or her people must inevitably have perished.”⁷⁹

On July 3, Lieutenant Gregory, then at Key West, made his report to Commodore Porter, saying that the *Grampus* had sailed from the Balize April 24, and after convoying vessels bound to Tabasco and Vera Cruz, came to Campeche May 13, where information was received of piracies committed upon Americans. The coast of Yucatan, from Cape Catouche, its northern extremity, to the bottom of the Gulf, was “infested by several gangs of pirates, who had been guilty of every atrocity imaginable.” There were a good many American vessels at the various ports of the region, and Gregory remained until June 25, “scouring the coast up and down.” It was learned that the pirates, sometimes to the number of more than a hundred, were congregated at a place near Cape Catouche. The authorities at Campeche “requested me to land and destroy the place. The pirates issue from their post in barges, small vessels, and in canoes, hover along the shores, enter the harbour, murder and destroy almost all that fall in their power. On the 2nd June the

⁷⁹ *Captains' Letters*, 1823, II, Nos. 43, 44 (April 15, 19); *Niles*, April 12, 1823.

American Sch. *Shibbolet*[h], Capt. Perry, of N. Y., being then ready for sea, was boarded by a canoe having fourteen of these villians on board. The watch was instantly murdered, eight others of the crew were put in the fore-castle, the hatch spiked down, a ton or more of Logwood put over, the head sails set—with the wind off shore—and fire put to the vessel in the cabin. By the most extraordinary exertion, these now broke out in time to save their lives. I arrived while the vessel was burning down. . . . The people of the country were much exasperated and turned out to hunt them from their shores. A party of Dragoons having met them, a skirmish insured, wherein the Captain of Dragoons and several of his men were killed and the pirates, taking to their boats, escaped." These pirates had "direct and uninterrupted intercourse with Havanna."⁸⁰

Commodore Porter expressed the opinion that, owing to the thorough work of his squadron on the north coast of Cuba, not a pirate could be found between Point Yacos (Icacos) and Cape San Antonio, but he was perhaps too optimistic. A letter from Key West says: "Excluded from the ocean, they are carrying on their trade on the land. Large bodies of them, well mounted and armed, are plundering the plantations and murdering the people of Cuba. They abound in the neighborhood of Matanzas. A party of cavalry had captured five of them and the militia had been turned out to scour the country. If hemmed in much longer by Com. Porter, the authorities of Cuba in self-defence must exterminate them, if they do not abandon their horrible business. Not one piracy has been lately committed."⁸¹

In a private letter of June 11 the commodore gives a brief summary of conditions at that time. "I keep everyone very busy and, although the service has been severe and some are very sick of it, I have good reason for believing that all who leave my command will do it with a desire to return to it whenever their services may be wanted. The fact is that the disappearance of all the

⁸⁰ From original MS. in N. Y. Public Library; *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 260.

⁸¹ *Niles*, May 31, 1823.

pirates and our want of success in catching the rascals is somewhat discouraging to us, but all are satisfied that our failure was owing to other causes than a want of exertion on our part. The fact is our enemy is an invisible one; he has only to throw on the fairy mantle of a Spanish passport, which they all go furnished with, and the pirate is completely concealed from our view. Piracy is now down on this side of the island and I hope soon to give as good an account of the other side. A pirate has, however, appeared there and made two captures lately, but most of the pack, the *Greyhound*, the *Terrier*, *Weazle*, *Fox*, and two barges are in full pursuit; if he escapes, he must have good luck." The British had been taking care of the south side of Cuba.⁸²

About the middle of June, Lieutenant Thomas M. Newell, commanding the schooner *Ferret*, began "a diligent search in all the by ports and bays" between Havana and Matanzas. He discovered a 16-oared barge, armed and well manned, with six other boats, in a small bay near Matanzas. He sent in a boat to reconnoitre, which was nearly sunk by the fire of the pirates. He then took possession of a small coaster near by, manned her and tried to get into the bay, but was prevented by the very shoal water and heavy sea. The next day he obtained another boat, entered the lagoon and found two of the pirates' boats sunk. The barge, however, had been taken farther up, out of reach.⁸³

Papers, Naval, II, 265.

Lieutenant Watson, commanding the *Sea Gull*, communicated to the commodore, July 11, an account of his "proceedings in the barges *Gallinipper* and *Mosquito*. . . . Whilst cruising in Siguapa bay [near Cardenas] we discovered a large topsail schooner with a launch in company, working up to an anchorage at which several merchant vessels were then lying. Being to windward, I bore up in the *Gallinipper* for the purpose of ascertaining their characters, and when within gun-shot, perceiving the large vessel to be well armed and her deck filled with men, I hoisted our colors, on seeing which they displayed the

⁸² *Niles*, July 19, 1823.

⁸³ From original MS. in N. Y. Public Library; *Am. State*

Spanish flag and the schooner, having brailed up her foresail, commenced firing at the *Gallinipper*. I immediately kept away and ran down upon her weather quarter, making signal at the same time for the *Mosquito* to close. Having much the advantage in sailing they did not permit us to do so, but made all sail before the wind for the village of Siguapa, to which place we pursued them and after a short action succeeded in taking both vessels and effecting the almost total destruction of their crews, amounting . . . to seventy or eighty [men]. They engaged us without colors of any description, having hauled down the Spanish flag after firing the first gun." The pirates tried to escape ashore, but very few succeeded.⁸⁴

The story of the end of this fight may be given in the words of another report, according to which, "so exasperated were our men that it was impossible for their officers to restrain them and many were killed after orders were given to grant quarters. Twenty-seven dead were counted, some sunk, five taken prisoners by the barge-men and eight taken by a party of Spaniards on shore; the officers calculated that from thirty to thirty-five were killed. The schooner mounted a long nine pounder on a pivot, and 4 fours, with every other necessary armament and . . . commanded by the notorious Diablero or Little Devil."⁸⁵

In transmitting Lieutenant Watson's report to the Navy Department, July 17, Commodore Porter adds: "When we take into consideration the immense superiority of force opposed to him, the advantage and preparation on the part of the pirates, and the result of the action, we cannot but be impressed with the conviction that nothing less than providential influence and protection could have occasioned consequences so fatal to the pirates and so exempt from injury on our side as to appear almost miraculous. The five surviving pirates, being desperately wounded, I have, in compliment to the favorable disposition and zealous co-operation of the authorities of Ha-

⁸⁴ *Captains' Letters*, 1823, IV, No. 14; *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 1113, 1114, II, 275.

⁸⁵ *Niles*, August 2, 1823.

vana, sent to the captain-general of Cuba, to be tried by the laws of Spain."⁸⁶

In a long report, dated August 10, 1823, Lieutenant Kearney, commanding the schooner *Greyhound*, then at Key West, related his experiences during a cruise south of Cuba, in July. Certain pirates who had committed outrages upon American vessels had been apprehended and were held in prison by the Spanish authorities at Trinidad, thirty miles east of Cienfuegos. Kearney established very friendly relations with the governor of that place. "He tendered us every civility and aid in his power."

In company with the schooner *Beagle*, Lieutenant Newton, off Cape Cruz, Kearney fell in with a legitimate privateer from Colombia, which must have been a rare experience. Wishing to examine the cape, Kearney and Newton anchored their vessels and went ashore together in a boat. Having re-embarked, they rowed around the point of the cape, and when close to shore were fired upon from behind rocks and bushes. "Thus situated, with a cross fire upon us, enabled only occasionally to return the fire of the party in ambush, as some of them would dodge from bush to bush or rock to rock, having for our arms but a fowling piece and one or two muskets, we were induced to return to our vessels." The next day they made another attempt, hoisting colors on their boat, and were again fired upon. The schooners were then warped around the cape and anchored in a smooth, shallow harbor inside the reef, within gunshot of the ambush.

Lieutenant Farragut was sent ashore, with a party of seamen and marines, with orders to attempt to get in the rear of the pirates. The schooners then opened fire, and later another landing party was sent in to attack them in front. The pirates then retreated and were pursued, but knowing the country, got away. In a cave human bones were found, and in the vicinity four houses and eight boats. These, with other property, were burned or otherwise destroyed. The arms found, two swivels and small arms, were brought away. "Finding our pursuit of

⁸⁶ *Captains' Letters*, 1823, IV, No. 14; *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 1113, II, 227.

the pirates promised no success, I considered it unimportant to remain longer at the cape, having destroyed their means of doing further mischief for a time, and taking into consideration the state of our officers and men, worn down by fatigue from a long pursuit over one of the roughest countries I have ever seen, their clothes nearly torn off from bushes of impenetrable thickness, and their shoes cut off their feet by sharp-pointed rocks over which they passed, I abandoned the place."⁸⁷

According to the most reliable accounts, deep-sea piracy had by this time almost entirely disappeared, but boats from the shore were lying in wait, constantly on the lookout for vessels becalmed. The ships of the squadron maintained a partial blockade at certain points which was sometimes irritating to the Spanish officials. "Lieut. Gregory, in the U. S. schooner *Grampus*, has been for some time off Matanzas, watching and inspecting all vessels that go in or pass out, effectually preventing piracy in that quarter. This appears to have displeased some there and even the governor had sent him word that he remained too long, that Spanish vessels of war could anchor for forty-eight hours only; but Lieut. Gregory frankly stated his object and said that he would remain where he was until compelled to retire."⁸⁸

In a court of inquiry held two years later, the peculiar character of the service performed by the Navy in the West Indies in 1823 was brought out, and the report of the court's proceedings made known some interesting facts. "A large portion of the officers and men was employed in the small schooners and in open boats—in a severe climate—exposed to the heat of a tropical sun by day and to the not less dangerous dews and exhalations at night. The vessels themselves, from their size, were destitute of suitable accommodations, and the operations in which they were engaged necessarily imposed incessant fatigue and constant exposure. One fact may be deserving of particular notice, as exhibiting a specimen of the nature of this service. It is in evidence before the court that Lieut. Platt

⁸⁷ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 246; *Life of Farragut*, 95.

⁸⁸ *Niles*, August 30, 1823.

was employed for sixty-eight successive days in an open barge on the north-west coast of Cuba, in the examination of the inlets, bays, keys, and other places of piratical resort."⁸⁹

In August, "such was the incessant occupation of the squadron under command of Commodore Porter, so widely dispersed, and such its deficiencies in strength, that he was compelled to discontinue, for a time, the practice of giving convoy off Havana and to bestow a more undivided attention to the pursuit and destruction of pirates. The continual presence of a vigilant force had rendered the north coast of Cuba comparatively safe from their depredations and they had retired to other scenes, into which it became necessary to follow them."⁹⁰

Shortly after this "the yellow fever made its appearance at Thompson's Island and in the squadron. The fatal consequences are stated in the report made by the secretary of the navy to the president of the United States under date of 21st September, 1823, and in the reports of Commodore Rodgers and the physician who accompanied him to make an examination of the island. . . . Commodore Porter himself, by authority of the department, and suffering from the effects of an attack of the fever, left the West India seas with a considerable portion of his force and returned to the United States, as a necessary measure for the restoration of the health of the squadron. To such an extent had this disease carried its ravages, that it was considered prudent to direct the *John Adams* and *Peacock* to keep in company during their homeward route, for the purpose of affording mutual protection."⁹¹

In consequence of this epidemic of fever the operations of the squadron were necessarily much reduced during the fall of 1823 and a revival of activity on the part of the pirates was a natural result. "It appears that the *Peacock*, *John Adams*, *Sea Gull*, *Beagle*, *Grampus*, *Wild Cat*, *Weasel*, and *Porpoise* were in the United States during different portions of that time, undergoing repairs

⁸⁹ *Niles*, October 8, 1825.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Niles*, October 8, 1825.

and recruiting their crews, and as soon as they could be equipped, most of these small vessels resumed their stations."⁹² The brig *Enterprise*, which had had a remarkably successful career and was looked upon as a lucky ship, was wrecked on the island of Little Curaçao; all hands were saved.⁹³

At the end of the year 1823 the Secretary of the Navy reported that "Piracy as a system has been repressed in the neighborhood of the island of Cuba and now requires only to be watched by a proper force to be prevented from afflicting commerce any further in that quarter. The public authorities of the island of Cuba manifested a friendly disposition towards the squadron and rendered much assistance in the pursuit of its objects."

President Monroe, in his annual message, referred to less satisfactory conditions in Porto Rico. Outrages continued about that island. "They have been committed there under the abusive issue of Spanish commissions." The governor professed lack of authority and replied to complaints by reference to Spain. "The minister of the United States to that court was specially instructed to urge the necessity of the immediate and effectual interposition of that government, directing restitution and indemnity for wrongs already committed and interdicting the repetition of them. The minister, as has been seen, was debarred access to the Spanish Government, and in the meantime several new cases of flagrant outrage have occurred and citizens of the United States in the island of Porto Rico have suffered, and others have been threatened with assassination, for asserting their unquestionable rights, even before the lawful tribunals of the country.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Emmons*, 8, 9.



U. S. CORVETTE "JOHN ADAMS"

Flagship of the West India Squadron 1822

From the original negative in the Bradlee Collection of the Essex Institute

VI. SECOND YEAR OF PORTER'S COMMAND.

In 1824 the West India squadron was slightly reduced in numbers and very late in reaching the station, owing to the dilatoriness of Congress. The sloop of war *Peacock* is missing from the list, as well as the *Enterprise*; and most, if not all, the barges were laid up for lack of crews. There remained, then, the *John Adams*, *Hornet*, *Sea Gull*, *Spark*, eleven schooners, two gunboats, and the storeship *Decoy*.

In February, Lieutenant John T. Newton, commanding the brig *Spark*, landed on the Island of Mona, west of Porto Rico, where he found the papers and other property of the brig *William Henry*, of Baltimore, which the pirates had taken not long before. In the spring, the *Grampus* and *Sea Gull* made a few captures. Commodore Porter, who sailed from the United States in February, made a voyage of inspection and, April 8, being then at Havana on board the *John Adams*, he reported the result. "I have touched at St. Bartholomews, St. Christophers, St. Thomas, examined the south coast of Porto Rico, looking in at the Dead Man's Chest and Ponce, two noted places for Porto Rico privateers, touching at Mona's, St. Domingo, Beata, and Kingston, making diligent inquiries and examinations for piratical vessels and offering convoy and protection to vessels of all nations from piratical aggressions. In the course of this long route, although we have visited places formerly the rendezvous of pirates and seen evidence of their having been recently there, we have not been so fortunate as to capture any nor have we seen any vessels of a suspicious character," except one small schooner, which he hopes to take later on. The commodore learned that the British had been attempting to suppress a revival of piracy on the south side of Cuba and about the Isle of Pines, and the pirates seemed to be dispersed there. If Porter had had a larger number of small vessels, he might have accomplished much more.

As it was, he did not escape criticism for failure to extirpate piracy altogether.⁹⁴

In April Commander Jesse Wilkinson, commanding the steamer *Sea Gull*, closely examined the northwest coast of Cuba, behind the Colorados reefs, going over the same ground covered by Commander Cassin the year before. His fruitless search, according to his report of April 24, showed that here, at least, and for the time being, piracy had been rooted out. He learned that shortly before his arrival the notorious Diablero had sailed away, probably bound for the coast of Yucatan.⁹⁵

Piracy, however, broke out afresh in other places. One vessel was chased off Matanzas and another was captured, but soon recaptured by the *Sea Gull*. Cases were reported as being frequent along the coast of Porto Rico.⁹⁶

From a report of the Foreign Relations Committee of the House of Representatives, May 19, 1824, it would appear that the attitude of the Cuban authorities was more friendly than formerly. "The present Captain General of the island of Cuba has acted with great courtesy towards our commander and officers engaged on this service and has co-operated with them by arresting the pirates who escaped to the shore, nor has he complained when our officers have found it necessary to pursue them and to break up their haunts on the desert and unfrequented keys that surround the island. In no case, however, within our knowledge, where pirates have been seized by the authorities of the island, have they been brought to that punishment their crimes merited; and those who are well known to have fitted out piratical cruisers and to have sold their plunder with the utmost notoriety, are suffered to remain in Havana and Regla in the unmolested enjoyment of the fruits of their crimes. Under these circumstances the British and American squadrons in those seas may repress piracy so long as they continue cruising in the neighborhood of the island, but there is

⁹⁴ *N. Y. Evening Post*, May 1, 1824; *Captains' Letters*, 1824, I, No. 154a.

⁹⁵ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 1006.

⁹⁶ *Niles*, May 1, 1824; *N. Y. Evening Post*, May 25, 1824.

reason to apprehend that on their removal, similar outrages on our commerce will be renewed. In the opinion of your committee, piracy can only be effectually suppressed by the Government of Spain and by the authorities of the island taking the necessary measures to prevent piratical vessels or boats from being equipped or sailing from any part of the island, and to apprehend and punish every description of outlaws, as well as those who actually commit acts of piracy as those who receive and traffic in goods plundered on the high seas."

The Committee, speaking of the less satisfactory conditions at Porto Rico, found "that it had been the practice of these privateers not to send in their prizes to the large and frequented ports, where impartial judges could determine on the validity of the capture and where the captured could have the means of fairly defending their rights, but to send them into distant and obscure seaports, where the courts are notoriously corrupt and where the captains and owners were deprived of the means of making even statements of their cases. There are many instances of vessels condemned most unjustly, and even where they have had the rare good fortune to escape condemnation, their owners have been subjected to ruinous costs and charges, and in some cases, before the vessels have reached the port, the cargoes and property have been plundered and the officers and crew treated in a cruel and barbarous manner. In San Juan, the principal town of the island of Porto Rico, attempts have been made to assassinate the commercial agent of the United States and the master of a merchant vessel, in order, as they believe, to prevent them from taking legal measures to recover property unlawfully captured."

The Committee advised against the adoption of reprisals and blockade of the island, pending the negotiations of the United States minister in Spain, but "they earnestly recommend that two or three small cruisers should be constantly kept off the ports of San Juan and in the Mona Passage, so as to protect our commerce and intercept at the entrance of San Juan, Aguadilla, Mayaguez, Cape Roco, and Ponce, Americans vessels unlawfully cap-

tured by Spanish privateers; and that the commanders of the United States vessels of war be instructed to capture and send into a port of the United States for trial any privateer that commits an outrage on the persons, or plunders the property of citizens of the United States on the high seas, whenever good and sufficient testimony of such piratical act can be obtained."⁹⁷

As long as our navy in the West Indies was actively cruising, piracy was kept under control and very few cases were reported. Unfortunately, however, another epidemic of yellow fever broke out in the summer of 1824, earlier than the year before. Most of the squadron were sent north to save the lives of their crews. From July 3 to August 7, alone, the arrivals at northern ports of the *Shark*, *Grampus*, *Jackall*, *John Adams*, *Beagle*, *Wild Cat*, and *Sea Gull* were reported. This was the pirates' opportunity. They took advantage of it and conditions were soon nearly as bad as before. But people at home, having learned from experience, were less inclined than formerly to be over sanguine.⁹⁸

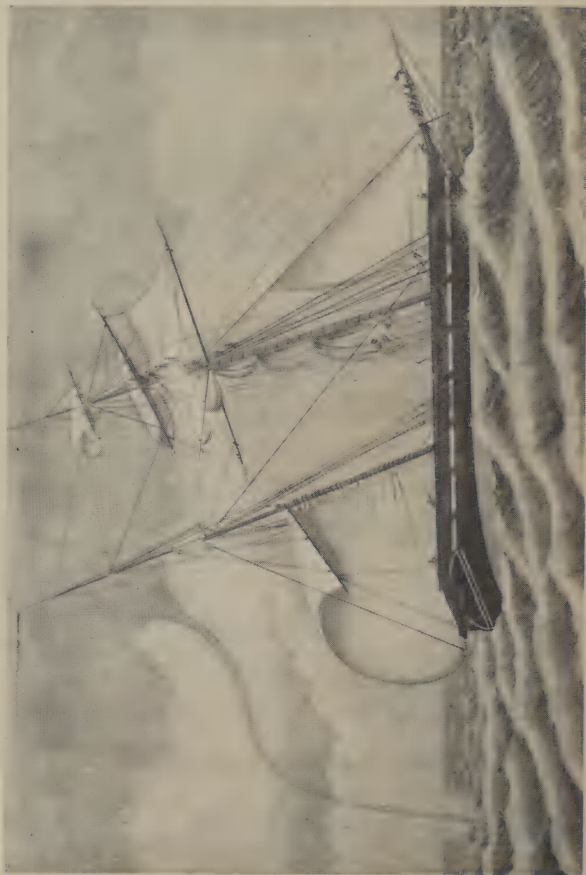
During this fresh outbreak of piracy, nine or ten cases were reported. According to a letter of July 5, from the acting consul at Havana, John Mountain, "the brig *Castor*, of Portland, Capt. Hood, from thence bound to Matanzas, was, on the 1st inst. in the bay of Matanzas, boarded by a boat with seven men armed with muskets, carbines, swords, pistols, and knives, who ordered the Captain to take the vessel out; when, after beating the master most cruelly and driving the crew below, brought the vessel to anchor in the port of Escondido, where they robbed her of everything portable on board." The vessel was then released and proceeded to Havana.⁹⁹

Thomas Randall, agent of commerce and seamen at Porto Rico and Cuba, wrote from Havana, on July 14, to the Secretary of State, Hon. John Quincy Adams, telling of atrocities on the American schooner *Mercator*, according to the story of a passenger. Mr. Randall deplors

⁹⁷ *Am. State Papers, Foreign*, V, 343.

⁹⁸ *Niles*, July 3, 17, 24, August 7, 1824.

⁹⁹ *Am. State Papers, Foreign*, V, 498.



U. S. SCHOONER "SHARK"
From a print in the Bradlee collection

the absence of our naval force and adds: "It may now be assumed as an undoubted fact that the crime of piracy is not limited to mariners who are active agents in its perpetration, but has advocates and partizans in a very numerous class of the inhabitants of this island. Of the latter class, many have direct concern in the equipment and arming of those vessels and a participation in their plunder. Others, amongst the planters on the coast and the merchants, are indirectly concerned in the great profits derived from purchasing the property plundered by them. Besides those persons thus concerned, the Spaniards of this Island generally observe with perfect apathy, and some even with pleasure, those depredations against the commerce of the United States; for it is not a little extraordinary that one may hear, in the streets of Matanzas and even of this city, this most odious crime warmly defended on principle by men of property and deemed respectable here. They urge in its defence that it is but a retaliation for the conduct of citizens of the United States in capturing under the Insurgent flag the property of Spaniards. They say the conduct of the people of Regla and Matanzas and other places, from which these pirates issue, is no worse than that pursued in certain places in the United States, which they name. . . .

"They assert that the conduct of our Government and its citizens, in this particular, is no less reprehensible than that which is charged against the Spaniards in respect to piracy. I shall not stop to show the utter absence of truth in the charge made against the Government of the United States, and although I entirely disapprove of the conduct of those Americans who, for the sake of plunder, have engaged in the war between Spain and her colonies, I do not think it necessary to point out the great difference of turpitude in the respective practices. I merely mention the opinions of those Spaniards to give semblance and probability to the sentiments they utter, which would otherwise, from their extreme perversity and immorality, be scarcely credited. The moment a prize to the pirates arrives on the coast, persons from the interior throng to the spot to share in or purchase the plunder,

as in the late case of the brig *Castor*. The property soon finds its way into the cities and tempts cupidity by the advantages of the traffic. . . .

“While then those practices, so far from finding a corrective or check in the moral feeling of this community, are rather countenanced and aided by it, it is obvious that a government of even greater energy and virtue than that of this island would be scarcely adequate to their suppression. But with the exception of the present chief of this Government and a very few of its highest officers, it is more than suspected that the great majority of their public agents are either indifferent or feel an interest adverse to its suppression. Participating in the general prejudices of their countrymen, they have also a pecuniary interest in occasionally conniving at those robberies and in protecting their perpetrators from the hands of justice.”¹⁰⁰

After his arrival in the United States in the summer of 1824, Commodore Porter wrote from Washington, August 10, to the new Secretary of the Navy, Hon. Samuel L. Southard. He complained of certain criticisms that had been made of his conduct of the campaign against piracy. “In the various letters accompanying these statements, it is enjoined on me to use my efforts and make such disposition of the forces under my command as will render piratical aggressions of this description less frequent, if it is possible. The whole history of my operations, in conjunction with the authorities of Cuba, against the pirates, renders any defence of my conduct, or the conduct of those under my command, against any imputations of neglect from any quarter unnecessary, as it is well known to the Department that we have been devoted to the inglorious service, sacrificing health, comfort, and personal interests for the sole object of suppressing a system of long continuance.” Upon the arrival of the American squadron in Cuban waters, “the most zealous co-operation was commenced on the part of the government of Cuba, which has ever since continued and has changed entirely the character of the piracy, from the

¹⁰⁰ *Am. State Papers, Foreign*, V, 492.

bloody and remorseless manner in which it was conducted to simply plundering of property, and the means from large cruising vessels to open boats. This latter mode of carrying on their depredations renders it extremely difficult to detect them and is calculated to baffle the efforts of the most vigilant, from the ease with which they are enabled to possess themselves of boats along the coast of Cuba, the certainty of being enabled to escape to the unsettled coasts of that island, and the certainty for some hours in the early part of every day that merchant vessels may be found becalmed near the land."

The Commodore believed that the least show of resistance on the part of merchantmen would, in most cases, be enough to intimidate the pirates, who generally operated in small parties in open boats. "Surely, sir, blame should not be attached to us or to the Government of Cuba for the dastardly conduct of those who, with the most ordinary means of defence which every merchant vessel affords, could permit such an act. . . . The cause is attributable almost entirely to the parsimony of the owners, who fail to furnish a few weapons to put into the hands of the crew of vessels destined to Cuba."

Already Porter was beginning to send the vessels of his squadron back to Cuba. During their absence the schooners *Terrier* and *Ferret* seem to have been almost alone on the station. Numerous reports of outrages were published, at that time and later, several of a murderous character which did not bear out the Commodore's opinion that piracy had taken on a more humane aspect. It is clear that, under the circumstances, Porter was very seriously hampered in his efforts and that no one could have done better, and probably very few as well. In this letter of August 10, he continues: "The charge, then, or intimation in any shape, of neglect on the part of myself or officers, to the interest of the merchants, who have no feeling but for their own pecuniary concerns, is as you perceive unfounded. It is true that, warned by the dreadful mortality of last year and by approaching disease, I left the West Indies and ordered home the greater part of the force under my command, and the only cause of regret to

me now is that I did not remove them earlier, by which many valuable lives would have been saved, and that there should be a necessity for their return at this unfavorable season, which will undoubtedly cause the death of more."¹⁰¹

Letters from Thomas Randall to Secretary Adams in September tell of continued piracies off Matanzas and of the sale of stolen goods in that town. "Many articles of a peculiar fabric and known not to have been regularly introduced are seen there constantly, such as French hats of the newest fashions on the heads of vulgar ruffians. The retailers of goods are seen travelling to the coast with pack-horses, for the known purpose of making purchases from the pirates." The British sloop of war *Icarus* sent a boat expedition into Bahia Honda, which "succeeded in capturing two pirate vessels and in killing several of the pirates. On the approach of the boats the pirates, about 40 in number, fled into the bushes. On board one of the pirate vessels were confined the captain and crew of the brig *Henry*, of Hartford, Conn., who were most seasonably released. The *Henry* was captured on the 16th ult., bound from a port in Mexico to Matanzas with a cargo of mules. The captain and his crew were treated with the accustomed cruelty of those ruffians and were designed to be killed the next day, after they had assisted in landing the mules." The wrecks of twelve vessels, recently destroyed by the pirates, were found in the bay.¹⁰²

Lieutenant Charles W. Skinner, in the schooner *Porpoise*, anchored in the harbor of Matanzas, October 18, 1824. With his boats, under the command of Lieutenants Hunter and Johnson, he made a secret examination of adjoining bays and inlets on the night of the 19th. "On the evening of the 22d, Lieutenant Hunter returned with a piratical schooner of one carriage gun, one new American cutter, and two other boats; one, having three men on board, he captured in Sewappa bay. Every appearance justified the suspicion of piracy.

¹⁰¹ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 233; *Log of Terrier*.

¹⁰² *Am. State Papers, Foreign*, V, 494, 496.

“The persons informed Lieutenant Hunter their vessel had been taken by armed men, the boat they were in given in exchange, with a promise of returning in a few days and restoring their vessel. The next day, off Camrioca, Lieutenant Hunter discovered a suspicious schooner standing to sea in chase of a vessel in sight. On his approach the schooner tacked and made for the shore, closely pursued by the boats. The crew abandoned the vessel and fled to the wood, where they were sought for in vain. She proved to be a pirate, mounting one gun and small arms. From the number of nautical instruments, trunks of clothing, rigging and sails, with three sets of American colors found on board, she must have robbed several vessels. From stains of blood on the clothes and other articles on board, I fear the unfortunate persons to whom they belonged must have been murdered.” Several other captures of pirates were made by vessels of the navy in October and November.¹⁰³

Commodore Porter returned to his station in the *John Adams* early in November, and on the 12th arrived at St. Thomas. Just after this occurred the episode known as the Foxardo Affair.

¹⁰³ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 255; *Niles*, November 6, 20, December 25, 1824; *Log of the Porpoise*.

VII. THE FOXARDO AFFAIR.

In October, 1824, the U. S. schooner *Beagle*, commanded by Lieutenant Charles T. Platt, lay at anchor in the harbor of St. Thomas. On the morning of the 26th, Lieutenant Platt was informed that goods had been stolen from the store of Cabot, Bailey & Co., American citizens in business at St. Thomas. It was believed that these goods had been taken to Foxardo (Fajardo), a small town at the eastern end of Porto Rico. Stephen Cabot, a member of the firm and United States vice-consular agent, requested Platt to assist in recovering the property. Accordingly the *Beagle* was got ready for sea and a pilot was taken, also a clerk of the injured merchant with a letter to leading citizens of Foxardo.

At six P. M. October 26, the *Beagle* anchored in Foxardo harbor with colors flying. "Early the next morning," Lieutenant Platt afterwards testified in a Court of Inquiry, "a boat came alongside with a message from the Captain of the port, who said he would be happy to see me on shore. I inquired whether he was acquainted with the character of the vessel, to which he replied yes. Lest he might be mistaken, I directed him to inform the Captain of the port it was the United States Schooner *Beagle* and that I should be on shore as soon as possible."¹⁰⁴

The lieutenant landed and went directly to the Captain of the port. "I informed [him] of the object of my visit and my reasons for appearing in citizen's dress, and after producing the letter addressed to Mr. Campos, he appeared perfectly satisfied with my character and directed me to call upon the Alcalde and inform him. I called on the Alcalde and explained to him my object and again produced the letter to Mr. Campos. He was perfectly satisfied with my character and appeared very much pleased that I had taken the precaution to come on shore in citizen's dress. He then stated that he had no doubt

¹⁰⁴ Porter's *Expedition to Foxardo*, 14.

that he should be able to obtain the goods before night, or ascertain where they were."¹⁰⁵

The friendly aspect of affairs then took on a change. While taking breakfast at a public house, Platt was requested to call at the Alcalde's office. On his arrival he inquired for that official, when the captain of the port demanded the *Beagle's* register. Platt replied that a man-of-war carried no register and offered to show his commission and other evidence. He was then put under arrest, but was allowed to send for his commission and uniform on board the *Beagle*. When these were brought, Platt put on his uniform and showed his commission. After some deliberation, he says, "they pronounced the commission a forgery and me a damned pirate, and ordered me to be confined in the jail." He protested, and after a short confinement was released and put in charge of a sentry. Later he was allowed to send on board for his orders, which seemed to make more of an impression. A consultation was held, which resulted in his release and return to his vessel. He then lost no time in getting under way. Up to this point, Platt's testimony before the court differs slightly, but in no essential particular, from his report to Commodore Porter.¹⁰⁶

On November 12, Commodore Porter in the *John Adams* came into St. Thomas and Lieutenant Platt informed him of what had taken place at Foxardo. Porter at once resolved to visit Foxardo and obtain redress for the insult offered to the flag of the United States and to an officer of the navy. The next morning the *John Adams*, *Beagle*, and *Grampus*, the latter commanded by Lieutenant John D. Sloat, got under way. For lack of wind they made slow progress. On account of shallow water and dangerous navigation the *John Adams* anchored twenty-two miles from Foxardo. Her boats, carrying over a hundred men, were taken in tow by the *Grampus*. The two schooners kept on through the night and early in the morning of the 14th came to anchor in Foxardo harbor, the *Grampus* off a battery on a low hill near the beach,

¹⁰⁵ Porter's *Expedition to Foxardo*, 14, 15.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 15, 16.

the *Beagle* at a point covering the proposed landing place.¹⁰⁷

A landing party, comprising about two hundred officers and men, went ashore. One of the barges was sent to attack the battery near the beach. The guns were trained in a threatening manner on the barge, but as soon as the boat's crew landed the Spaniards ran without firing. There were two guns, 18-pounders, which were spiked. Meanwhile, the main party made a landing. The men were armed with muskets, bayonets, pistols, cutlasses and boarding pikes.¹⁰⁸

Lieutenant Stribling, with a flag of truce and a letter from the Commodore to the Alcalde, was sent up to the town. In the letter Porter represented that one of his officers had been "shamefully insulted and abused in your presence by the Captain of the port, after which he was sent by your orders to prison and when released therefrom was further insulted and abused by the inhabitants of the town. . . . I leave it entirely to your choice whether you come with the Captain of the port and the other offenders to me, for the purpose of satisfying me as to the part you have all had in this shameful transaction, or to await my visit at your town. Should you decline coming to me, I shall take with me an armed force competent to punish the aggressors, and if any resistance is made, the total destruction of Foxardo will be the certain and immediate consequence."¹⁰⁹

Without waiting for Stribling's return with the Alcalde, or a message, the whole party took up the march. A guard of marines was left with the boats, under the command of Lieutenant Thomas B. Barton, the senior marine officer of the expedition. A marine guard of about twenty-five men commanded by Lieutenant Horatio N. Crabb, another officer of the marine corps, was sent ahead of the main body. On the way to the town, about a mile distant, another battery was passed, and its two guns spiked.

Within forty rods of the town, before which a body

¹⁰⁷ *Expedition to Foxardo*, 16, 17.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 16, 17, 26, 27, 28-30, 50.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

of sixty or seventy armed men with a field-piece was drawn up, Porter halted. In about a quarter of an hour the white flag appeared with Lieutenant Stribling, the Alcalde, the Captain of the port, and an interpreter. The Alcalde admitted the indignities offered to Lieutenant Platt, but claimed to have acted under orders. Under threat of a resort to force of arms, and at the dictation of the Commodore, the Alcalde made a suitable apology. "This being done, we proceeded down to the beach. Refreshments were brought down and we returned to the vessels," which weighed anchor and went to sea. The whole transaction consumed about three hours.¹¹⁰

The next day, November 15, Porter wrote his report to the Navy Department. An extract will give his point of view. "Indignant at the outrages which have so repeatedly been heaped on us by the authorities of Porto Rico, I proceeded to this place [Passage Island], where I left the ship and taking with me the schooners *Grampus* and *Beagle* and the boats of the *John Adams*, with Capt. Dallas and part of his officers, seamen, and marines, proceeded to the port of Foxardo. . . . I found them prepared for defence, as they had received intimation from St. Thomas's of my intention of visiting the place. I . . . sent in a flag requiring the Alcalde or Governor, with the Captain of the port, the principal offenders, to come to me to make atonement for the outrage, giving them an hour to deliberate. They appeared accordingly and after begging pardon (in the presence of all the officers) of the officer who had been insulted, I permitted them to return to the town, on their promising to respect all American officers who may visit them hereafter."¹¹¹

In a short, curt letter, dated December 27, 1824, Secretary Southard expressed his strong disapproval of the Commodore's "extraordinary transactions at Foxardo," ordered him to return "without unnecessary delay to this place, to furnish such explanations as may be required," and directed him to turn over his command to Captain Warrington. Porter replied, January 30, 1825, that he

¹¹⁰ *Expedition to Foxardo*, 16-18, 26, 27, 28-30.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

would hold himself ready to justify his "conduct in every particular, not only by the laws of nations and of nature, and highly approved precedent, but, if necessary, by the orders of the Secretary of the Navy."¹¹²

After Porter's return to the United States he was summoned before a court of inquiry, of which Captain Isaac Chauncey was president. The court met in May, 1825, and inquired into his conduct at Foxardo, and later, at his own request, into his whole conduct of the campaign against the pirates. The report of the court on its first inquiry was unfavorable to Porter and resulted in his being ordered before a court-martial.

In concluding its report on the whole campaign, the court observed "that the manner in which the squadron under the command of captain Porter was employed, during the period of his command, appears to the court to have been highly honorable to him and to the officers and men; that the said forces were employed in the suppression of piracy in the most effective manner in which they could be employed, in conformity with the orders and instructions from the department; and that no part of them was on any occasion engaged in objects of inferior moment, to the injury of the public service."¹¹³

The court martial was held in July. Captain James Barron was president. Its verdict was that Captain Porter be sentenced to suspension for six months. Porter wrote a strong defence of his conduct, which is an interesting document. He drew a parallel between his actions and those of General Jackson, when he entered Florida in pursuit of Indians, for which he received only praise. Porter insisted that the public officials of Foxardo were in league with the pirates, of which there can be no reasonable doubt. Much evidence bearing on the character of the place was collected.¹¹⁴ Porter felt that he had been treated with injustice and the next year resigned his commission in the navy.

¹¹² *Expedition to Foxardo*, 47, 48.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 13,32; *Niles*, October 8, 1825.

¹¹⁴ *Expedition to Foxardo*, 53-90; *Beale's Report of the Trial of Commodore Porter; Proceedings of the Courts of Inquiry and Court Martial.*

During the months between his return from the West Indies and the end of his trial—in his correspondence and conversation with the Secretary of the Navy and his judges—Porter, as is not uncommon with high-spirited men, was not always, nor even usually, conciliatory and tactful, and doubtless caused irritation. But this could have influenced only men of small natures. His great services to his country and his value to the navy should have outweighed his offense, if indeed any existed. Every true American, from that day to this, knowing the facts, has rejoiced in his landing at Foxardo.

VIII. PORTER RECALLED.

It is now necessary to go back to the fall of 1824 and pick up the thread of the narrative. Speaking of the difficulties encountered by the officers and men of the West India squadron, the court of inquiry into Commodore Porter's conduct reported "that everything was done towards the suppression of piracy which could be accomplished with a force of that description and of such limited strength. The number of men employed was small and the greater part of the vessels engaged qualified only for a particular kind of operation. Their inconsiderable size rendered it impracticable to carry either provisions or water for any length of time. Repairs were frequently required, the stores were furnished from the United States, and the cruises therefore necessarily of short duration. It appears also that the confinement of the officers and men in the small schooners and barges upon the cruises and expeditions in which they were unremittingly occupied, exposed both by day and night to the baneful influence of a noxious climate, the necessities which drove them continually to Key West for the purpose of repairing the vessels and procuring supplies, combined to engender and add virulence to the malignant diseases which broke out and proved so destructive to life, compelling for two successive seasons the return to the United States of a large proportion of the squadron. Under these circumstances it appears to the court that the officers and men have eminently entitled themselves to the commendations which they have received."¹¹⁵

On the subject of convoy the court considered that the importance of protecting trade had not been overrated and that it should be looked upon "as one of the means of suppressing piracy. By affording convoy and adequate protection to private commerce, one of the principal inducements to piratical adventure was removed. . . . In no one particular does it appear to the court that the

¹¹⁵ *Niles*, October 8, 1825.

benefits produced by the squadron in the West India seas was more widely diffused or greater in amount. . . . Every vessel in the squadron, in addition to her ordinary and specific duties, was engaged in affording convoy on all occasions and in every quarter. . . . Lieut. Skinner alone, in the short period which intervened between the 30th March and the 3d July gave convoy to about one hundred and eighty vessels."¹¹⁶

One of the encouragements to piracy committed on American vessels seems to have been the undue leniency with which those who were captured were subsequently treated. Pardon by the President often followed conviction in court and resulted in the return of the culprit to his evil practices. The stern justice the pirates had learned to expect from the British, led them to prefer Americans as their prey.¹¹⁷

A particularly atrocious case of cold-blooded murder was reported by Lieutenant McKeever, commanding the steamer *Sea Gull*. The story came to him from Daniel Collins, second mate of the brig *Betsey*, Captain Ellis Hilton, which sailed from Wiscasset, Maine, for Matanzas late in November, 1824. "The Brig was cast away on one of the Doubleheaded Shot Keys about the 21st of December, when the officers and crew, seven in number, took the long boat and steered for the Island of Cuba, and the next day made one of the Keys about 20 leagues to windward, at which place they found two fishing huts and five men, with whom the Captain made an agreement to be brought with himself and crew to Matanzas. The night previous to their intended departure, which was two days after their landing, one of the fishermen was absent during the whole night. When they were on the point of shoving off, they were boarded and taken possession of by a boat having ten men on board, armed with muskets, blunderbusses, and cutlasses, which the fishermen told them when first seen was the King's launch, who soon after tied the Captain and crew of the *Betsey*, put them into the perogues of the fishermen, and

¹¹⁶ *Niles*, October 8 1825.

¹¹⁷ *N. Y. Evening Post*, November 15, 1824.

taking them into a little lagoon about half a mile from the huts, where they left their boat, taking with them no other arms than cutlasses, they deliberately commenced an indiscriminate murder by cutting off the head of Captain Hilton, which seemed to be the signal for dispatching the others. The informant was knocked overboard by a blow and finding that he had broken the cord with which he was tied, ran through the water (about knee deep) and swamps, followed by two of the murderers, but fortunately effected his escape, after witnessing the murder of his comrades with the exception of one, who had also broken his cord and was trying to escape, but presumes that he was overtaken, being very closely pursued by two or three. The informant on the sixth day got to an estate called Santa Clara on the Rio Palma, where he received some nourishment and rest and continued his route to Matanzas, where he arrived last evening, presented himself to Captain Holmes of the American ship *Shamrock*, belonging to the same owners (Mr. A. Wood of Wiscasset). Captain H. immediately recognized him and says that he is a sober, honest, and upright man."¹¹⁸

After his return to Wiscasset, Daniel Collins published a narrative of the cruise of the *Betsey*, in which he gives a gruesome account of the killing of her captain and first mate. "They seized Captain Hilton by the hair, bent his head and shoulders over the gunwhale, and I could distinctly hear them chopping the bone of the neck. They then wrung his neck, separated the head from the body by a slight draw of the sword, and let it drop into the water. There was a dying shriek, a convulsive struggle, and all I could discern was the arms dangling over the side of the canoe and the ragged stump pouring out the blood like a torrent. There was an imploring look in the innocent and youthful face of Mr. Merry that would have appealed to the heart of anyone but a Pirate. As he arose on his knees, in the posture of a penitent supplicating for mercy even on the verge of eternity, he was prostrated with a blow of the cutlass,

¹¹⁸ *Captains' Letters*, 1825, I, No. 43.

his bowels gushing out of the wound. They then pierced him through the breast in several places with a long pointed knife, and cut his throat from ear to ear."¹¹⁹

That the comparative apathy and indifference of earlier years, the failure to realize the situation in the West Indies, on the part of governmental authorities in the United States, had finally disappeared, was shown by the voluminous reports of the navy department and of congressional committees, and presidential messages. All this discussion was based on knowledge of conditions derived from the numerous reports of naval officers and governmental agents in the islands and the frequent newspaper accounts of robbery and murder.

The commercial agent at Havana, Thomas Randall, furnished much information, which, however, in Commodore Porter's opinion was not always fair to the navy. A letter from Randall to Secretary Adams, October 31, 1824, after relating further piracies, continues: "It cannot be endured that this band of remorseless wretches should be suffered longer to cumber the earth. The robberies and cruelties of the Barbary States, which have so often roused all Christendom to arms, were trifling in extent and ferocity, compared with those of the pirates of Cuba. It is in vain for commercial nations to rely for security upon mere preventive measures at sea or upon the efforts of the authorities and people of this island to extirpate it. . . . Even the present Governor, characterized as he is for firmness and moral courage, feels his power too precarious at this crisis to venture upon the measures of rigor and severity essential to its suppression. . . . The unprincipled and wicked have obtained the complete ascendancy and the honest few dare not denounce or pursue the criminals. In such a state of things, the pirates must be pursued by foreign forces into their retreats on land, and this community coerced by a severe and just retribution to aid in ejecting those miscreants from its bosom." He discourages the carrying of specie in vessels of war for the use of American merchants, one of the minor duties imposed

¹¹⁹ *Narrative of Daniel Collins*, 25.

on the West India squadron. "If the benefit to commerce by this medium for the transportation of specie, be of sufficient importance, it may be effected by vessels especially designated for that purpose. But experience shows that the suppression of piracy and the transportation of specie, on the late system, are incompatible."¹²⁰

In the annual report of the Navy Department, December 1, Secretary Southard mentions the difficulty of pursuing the pirates on land and the necessity of co-operation with the local governments. "Unless this co-operation be obtained, additional means ought to be entrusted to the Executive, to be used in such manner as experience shall dictate." The secretary expresses the same views three weeks later, to Hon. B. W. Crowninshield, chairman of the naval committee of the House of Representatives, and dwells on the need of large numbers of boats to chase the pirates into creeks and inlets. To carry so many boats, large vessels must be provided. "I would therefore respectfully recommend three or more frigates or sloops of war, as an addition to the forces now in the West Indies and Gulf of Mexico, or as a substitute for the small vessels. The sloops would be as competent to the object as the frigates and would be much less expensive. We cannot, however, detach that or even a less number from the stations where they now are without weakening our squadrons too much. It will be necessary to build them, which can be done in less time and at less expense than would require to repair and fit for sea the same number of frigates. . . . In addition to this provision, our officers should be authorized to pursue the pirates wherever they may fly. . . . The right to follow should be extended to the settled as well as the unsettled parts of the Islands; and should this prove ineffectual, a resort will be necessary to such a general and rigorous blockade, as will make both the local Governments and their subjects feel that their interest, as well as their honor, requires a respect for our rights and the rights of humanity. For such an extremity the proposed sloops of war will be indispensable."¹²¹

¹²⁰ *Am. State Papers, Foreign*, V, 496.

¹²¹ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 1004, II, 183.

The President's annual message recommends an increased naval force and speaks of the amphibious nature of the pirates, acting by sea, along shore, and on land. Their atrocious practices "must be attributed to the relaxed and feeble state of the local governments, since it is not doubted, from the high character of the governor of Cuba, who is well known and much respected here, that if he had the power he would promptly suppress it."

A body of merchants in Portland addressed a memorial to Congress. Portland and other Maine ports carried on an extensive trade with the West Indies, chiefly in lumber. The memorial rehearsed the whole subject and suggested an increase in the number of small cruisers. "During the summer and sickly season, they should never be allowed to enter any of the ports in that climate, but from necessity or in pursuit of pirates; by which means our commerce would be effectually guarded and the health of our brave seamen effectually secured."¹²²

The New York merchants advised "authorizing merchant vessels to arm for their own protection, . . . that the squadron on the Cuban station should be reinforced, that decoy vessels should be employed, and that ships of war be furnished with additional launches and boats calculated to pursue the pirates into their retreats and fastnesses." These memorials were presented in December.¹²³

The end of the year found the situation in the West Indies still occupying a great deal of public attention. Early in 1825 Congress attempted the solution of this difficult problem. The foreign relations committee of the Senate in a report refers to the evil as "ascribable to the asylum afforded the banditti in the colonies of Spain," and speaks of the efforts to obtain satisfaction from the Spanish government — efforts resulting only in vague promises on the part of that power. "Spain had been solemnly warned that if she did not promptly ac-

¹²² *Am. State Papers, Foreign*, V, 471.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, V, 428.

quit herself of her obligations to us on this subject, our government would be constrained from the nature of the outrages to become its own avenger and, availing itself of its own resources, protect the commerce and lives of the American citizens from destruction. . . . An appeal has been made to the local authorities, accompanied with a request, that if from weakness they were unable to exterminate the hordes of banditti who took shelter from pursuit within their territories, that permission might be given our forces to pursue them on land. This has been denied on the vain punctilio of national dignity. The posture in which Spain now stands is that of connivance in these injuries or incapacity to prevent them." The committee intimates that if it believed the conduct of Spain wilful, it would favor a resort to war, but under the circumstances would recommend only measures thought to be indispensable.¹²⁴

At the same time the House naval committee considered methods of carrying on the work. The means already "employed have displayed the vigilance of the Government and the activity, zeal, and devotion of the officers and seamen who have been assigned to that perilous service. . . . It becomes necessary for the Government to adapt the force to the existing character of the evil, and the committee are of the opinion that the best species of force which can be employed in future, while the pirates are confined to small craft, are the boats and launches which are attached to larger vessels. Sloops of war of the largest class may be well provided with launches and boats, of which several might be constantly employed in ferreting out these marauders and bringing them to condign punishment." The question of arming merchantmen is discussed. "The committee believe that if a considerable number of trading vessels should provide themselves for resistance and a few instances of successful resistance should be the consequence, the effect would be highly salutary and would greatly discourage

¹²⁴ *Am. State Papers, Foreign*, V, 489; *Niles*, January 15, 1825.

these banditti by rendering their vocation dangerous and fruitless."¹²⁵

The President in a special message to the Senate, January 13, 1825, joined in the discussion and presented three expedients. "One, by the pursuit of the offenders to the settled as well as the unsettled parts of the Island from whence they issue; another, by reprisal on the property of the inhabitants; and a third, by the blockade of the ports of those islands. It will be obvious that neither of these measures can be resorted to in a spirit of amity with Spain, otherwise than in a firm belief that neither the Government of Spain nor the Government of either of the islands has the power to suppress that atrocious practice, and that the United States interpose their aid for the accomplishment of an object which is of equal importance to them as well as to us. Acting on this principle, the facts which justify the proceeding being universally known and felt by all engaged in commerce in that sea, it may fairly be presumed that neither will the Government of Spain nor the Government of either of those islands, complain of a resort to either of those measures, or to all of them, should such resort be necessary. It is therefore suggested that a power commensurate with either resource be granted to the Executive, to be exercised according to his discretion and as circumstances may imperiously require."¹²⁶

A report of the House foreign relations committee, January 31, attributes to the blockade declared by General Morales, the commander of the Spanish forces, responsibility for "most of the evils since suffered by all commercial nations in the West Indies and Gulf of Mexico." Discussing the subject of arming merchantmen, the committee says: "There is no law forbidding such defensive armament, nor is any law required to justify it. It is, however, asserted that the restraints upon the armament of merchant vessels are inconvenient and oppressive and that they ought to be removed. The only provision

¹²⁵ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, I, 1049; 18th Congr., 2nd Sess., *Com. Rep.* by Mr. Crowninshield.

¹²⁶ *Am. State Papers, Foreign*, V, 490.

on this subject is that which requires bond and security to be given to prevent an unlawful use of the armed vessel—a provision which should not be changed, an adherence to which the best interest of commerce requires.” For the pursuit of pirates on land, the committee deemed an act of Congress unnecessary. Being criminals against all nations, they are punishable in every tribunal and it is the duty of all to hunt them down. “The pursuit of a mutual enemy into the territory of a friendly or allied power is a right of war; it cannot be deemed a violation of the sovereignty of that power; it confers a favor and imposes upon him an obligation of gratitude. . . . Instructions have been given to our naval commanders to pursue and capture on Spanish territory pirates who seek refuge or concealment there. The Government of Spain has been duly warned of the existence of these orders; it knows that they will be obeyed. No remonstrance has been made by it—no objections have, as far as the committee have been informed, been urged. The acquiescence of Spain is all that should be desired. A distinction is supposed to exist between pursuit of pirates on lands uninhabited and on those inhabited, and it is imagined that the authority of Congress is necessary to justify pursuit in the latter case, while in the former, the power of the Executive alone is sufficient. The committee do not admit the correctness of this distinction. Fresh pursuit is justifiable in either case, if necessary to the capture of the pirate. There is greater danger of collision with the friendly power when the object of pursuit flies into a settled country and greater care is requisite to avoid giving offense, but the same principles apply to either case and it is just as necessary that Congress should legislate to justify the capture of pirates as to authorize the pursuit of them into any place of refuge inhabited or unsettled.”¹²⁷

On January 1, 1825, Commodore Porter reported the disposition of his cruisers as follows: “The *Hornet*, Kennedy, cruising along the south side of Cuba, between

¹²⁷ *Am. State Papers, Foreign*, V, 585; 18th Congr., 2nd Sess., *Com. Rep.*



COMMODORE LEWIS WARRINGTON, U. S. N.

Engraved for the Analectic Magazine, 1815

Cape Cruz and [Cape San] Antonio; the *Porpoise*, Skinner, and *Weazel*, Boarman, in the Gulf of Mexico; the *Grampus*, Sloat, and the *Beagle*, Platt, to windward and to the coast of Columbia; the steam galliot *Sea Gull*, the schooner *Ferret*, Bell, barges *Diablita* and *Mosquito* in the neighborhood of Mantanzas; and corvette *John Adams*, Dallas, and the schooner *Terrier*, Paine, at Thompson's Island. There are three barges here but no men."¹²⁸

In February Captain Lewis Warrington arrived in the *John Adams* and assumed command of the West Indian station, relieving Captain Porter, who immediately returned on the same ship to the United States.

¹²⁸ *Captains' Letters*, 1825, I, No. 2.

IX. THE END OF PIRACY

In 1825 the frigate *Constellation*, Captain Melancthon T. Woolsey was added to the West India squadron. The *Wild Cat* was lost in 1824 and the *Ferret* early in 1825. The *Greyhound* and *Jackall*, being much out of repair, were sold. There were few if any other changes in the force.

A case of friendly and effective co-operation with local authorities was reported by Lieutenant John D. Sloat, commanding the *Grampus*, in a letter written at St. Thomas, March 12, to Secretary Southard. "Having learned that several vessels had been robbed by Pirates near Foxardo and that two sloops" of those taken "were equipped and cruizing as Pirates, I obtained two small sloops at this place, free of expense, by the very cordial co-operation of his Excellency, Governor Von Scholten of St. Thomas, who promptly ordered . . . a temporary embargo, to prevent the transmission of intelligence to the Pirates, which sloops I manned and armed under the command of Lieutenants Pendergrast and Wilson. . . . We sailed on the first of March and examined every place as far to the westward as Ponce without success, although we got frequent information of them. We anchored at Ponce on the evening of the 3d and took our men and officers on board [the *Grampus*]; the next morning at 10 o'clock a sloop was seen off the harbor, beating to the eastward, which was very confidently supposed to be one of those fitted out by the pirates. I again got one of the sloops and manned her under the command of Lieutenant Pendergrast . . . with [three officers and] twenty-three men, who sailed in pursuit. The next day at 3 o'clock they had the good fortune to fall in with her in the harbor of Boca del Infierno, which is very large and has many hiding places, where an action commenced that lasted forty-five minutes, when the pirates ran their sloop on shore and jumped overboard. Two of them were found killed and ten of those which

escaped to the shore were taken by the Spanish soldiers, five or six of whom were wounded and amongst them the famous piratical chief Cofrecinas, who has long been the terror of the coast and the rallying point of the pirates in this vicinity. As near as we can ascertain, he had fifteen or sixteen men on board and was armed with one four-pounder and muskets, pistols, cutlasses, and knives for his men. The sloop was got off and arrived safe with our tender at this place last evening, and I am happy to add that none of our people received any injury and all have returned in good health. . . . I received every assistance from the authorities of Ponce whilst there and they showed every desire to promote the success of the expedition." Lieutenant Sloat reported this affair to the governor of Porto Rico and received that official's profuse thanks and promises of co-operation. An order was issued to the local authorities throughout the island to give every possible assistance to the Americans.¹²⁹

The cordial and friendly attitude of Don Miguel de la Torres, governor of Porto Rico, was especially gratifying, because he had hitherto been somewhat hostile towards Americans and had been irritated by the Foxardo incident. Of the final chapter in the history of this particular band of outlaws, Sloat wrote to Secretary Southard from St. Thomas, April 5. "On my arrival at this place yesterday, I had the satisfaction to receive the information that all who made their escape from the vessel (eleven) were shot on Wednesday the 30th ultimo. They all except one met their fate in the most hardened manner. The celebrated Cofrecinas refused to be blindfolded, saying that he himself had murdered at least three or four hundred persons and it would be strange if by this time he should not know how to die. From his and other confessions twenty-eight others have been taken and seventeen are to be executed in a few days, and the remainder in a short time after. Those already executed have been beheaded and quartered and their parts sent to all the small ports round the island to

¹²⁹ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 104-107; *Expedition to Foxardo*, 100-107.

be exhibited. This capture is thought by the government of the Island to be of the greatest importance and it is believed from the number taken and convicted that it will be for a long time a complete check to piracies about that island."¹³⁰

It always gives satisfaction to hear of men of different nations working together in a common cause, and an instance is related by Lieutenant McKeever, commanding the *Sea Gull*, who in his report of April 1, 1825, tells of cordial and successful co-operation with British sailors in an enterprise requiring courage and judgment. The *Sea Gull*, accompanied by the barge *Gallinipper*, sailed from Matanzas to the eastward March 19. "At Stone Key I met his B. M. Ship *Dartmouth*, under the command of the Honble. Captain Maude, and was informed by him that some of his boats were there cruising to windward in company with H. B. M. Schooners *Union* and *Lion*. Continued our course and fell in with them the next evening at Cadiz Bay. As they were also in search of Pirates, but without any particular or certain information of their haunts, of which I was possessed, I deemed it proper to propose a co-operation, it being perfectly understood that I was to have the conducting of the enterprize. This proposition was cheerful acceded to." The *Sea Gull* and the British schooners were left at Cadiz Bay. McKeever in the *Gallinipper* with two small cutters, in company with a British barge and two cutters, set out on their quest for pirates. After various adventures, including the capsizing of the *Gallinipper*, which fortunately was righted again, the party reached the mouth of the River Sagua la Grande on the 25th. There a fisherman was found, who was impressed into service as pilot, and soon the masts of a schooner concealed in the bushes came in sight. The party immediately attacked.

Being unable to get through the narrow, shallow channel, they waded ashore and took a position within twenty yards of the schooner, which surrendered but again opened fire. It took a little time to subdue the pirates.

¹³⁰ *Niles*, April 30, 1825.

The chief twice tried to escape and some of his crew succeeded, but many were shot in the attempt. Nineteen prisoners were taken and eight dead accounted for; others were believed to have been killed. Six of the prisoners, including their chief, were wounded. On the other side was only one casualty—a British marine slightly wounded. The next day another schooner was taken, but the crew escaped ashore. It was these men who had murdered the crew of the brig *Betsey*, ashore on Double Headed Shot Keys in December. The pirates' establishment on shore was found and destroyed. The prize schooners were brought away but afterwards went ashore in a squall and were set on fire. The party returned and rejoined the *Dartmouth*. "The handsome manner in which we were seconded by the officers and crew of H. M. Ship *Dartmouth* merits our highest approbation."¹³¹

A correspondent in the public press, writing from Key West says of recent events: "The *Sea Gull* has just landed her prisoners, five of them dreadfully wounded with sabre cuts; among them is the captain, who fought resolutely; he has five wounds. . . . The chief officer of the port (Villa Clara), where the piratical schooner was fitted out, is among those taken. They state that they had a privateer's commission and deposited \$600 in the hands of the governor or commander of the above place, as security. . . . The *Sea Gull* had on board the figure head of a vessel, which was found in the piratical schooner. Report says it belonged to the ship *Balize*, a trader between New York and New Orleans. I understood from the officers of the *Sea Gull* that the bodies of thirteen unfortunate creatures were found tied to trees on shore; what vessel they belonged to has not been ascertained from the pirates. . . . The fact is, if piracy is to be suppressed, liberty must be granted, or *taken*, to pursue them on land as well as on the water, and that when the Spanish authorities shall fail to punish those captured on shore, self-preservation will require us to exert the right of doing it ourselves."¹³²

¹³¹ *Captains' Letters*, 1825, III, No. 15; *Niles*, April 30, 1825.

¹³² *Niles*, April 23, 30, 1825.

The pirates were showing signs of discouragement and the system was now on the decline. Commodore Warrington, on board the *Constellation* off Havana, reported to the Secretary of the Navy, August 29: "If pirates are now or have been in force lately on either side of Cuba, they have not only abstained from making captures, but they have concealed themselves so effectually as to prevent detection. The orderly conduct of fishermen on the coast, the steady pursuit of their occupation and absence of all suspicious persons induce a belief that there outlaws are not at present collected in any force. I shall, however, keep a watchful eye on the island and prevent, if possible, the commission of depredations which may be attempted under a belief that we are relying too much on appearances."¹³³

Secretary Southard said in his annual report in December: "The West India squadron now consists of the frigate *Constellation*, corvette *John Adams*, sloop *Hornet*, brig *Spark*, schooners *Grampus*, *Shark*, and *Fox*, and the storeship *Decoy*, with the barges. The duties assigned to it have been signally accomplished. Several captures of pirates were made in the early part of the year, of which the documents annexed furnish an account. Since that time the principal places where piracy existed have been diligently watched and no complaints have been made, to the knowledge of the Department, for several months past. Captain Warrington, an active, systematic, and enterprising officer, commands in that quarter, and seconded as he is by a commendable zeal and skill in his subordinate officers, it is believed that he will continue to repress that evil, which has heretofore produced so much anxiety and distress. There have been thirteen deaths among the officers attached to that squadron, occasioned by diseases contracted either in the vessels or in the ports of the West Indies. Against danger from this cause the commanding officer was particularly instructed to be upon his guard, and has no doubt been attentive to his orders; but severe exposures are incident to the service and, where so many officers are subjected to them,

¹³³ *Niles*, September 17, 1825.

it must be expected that they will prove fatal to some, especially to those who are not very cautious in guarding their health. We have been, however, so far fortunate as to suffer less from this cause in the present than in the preceding years, arising probably in part from a change in the size and character of the vessels employed; and steady attention is paid to the subject and such arrangements made as give the best hopes of lessening the evil." As it had been found that Key West was particularly unhealthy, it was decided to move the station to Pensacola, and this was done in the late summer. This was the beginning of the Pensacola Navy Yard.¹³⁴

In his first annual message, December 6, 1825, President Adams speaks of the greatly improved situation in the West Indies, but considers it not "probable that for years to come our immensely valuable commerce in those seas can navigate in security, without the steady continuance of an armed force devoted to its protection."

In 1826 the West India squadron was still further reduced by dropping the *Fox* and *Decoy* from the list given by Secretary Southard the year before. The *John Adams* cruised south of Cuba and the *Hornet* on the north side. Warrington wrote from the *Constellation* at Pensacola in July that "no piracies have been committed since my last letter. Depredations on our commerce are fortunately unheard of where they were formerly so frequent." Some cases, however, had been reported early in the year.¹³⁵

During the next three years there were a few sporadic cases of piracy. In 1828 a so-called privateer from Buenos Ayres was captured and sent to Pensacola.

In 1829 a brutal case of piracy and murder occurred, recalling the worst of former years. The second mate, Alfred Hill, escaped and the tale was related by him under oath. The brig *Attentive*, Captain Crozer, of Boston, sailed from Matanzas, homeward bound, February 22. There were on board the captain, two mates, three seamen, and a cook. Only a few hours from Matanzas

¹³⁴ *Am. State Papers, Naval*, II, 98.

¹³⁵ *Niles*, February 25, August 10, 1826.

the *Attentive* was "brought to by a piratical schooner of about 60 or 70 tons burthen full of men armed with cutlasses and having two large guns, who ordered the boat to be lowered and sent on board of the schooner, which was done, having on board Capt. Crozer and two men, Joseph Blanday and John Robinson; that as soon as the boat got alongside of the schooner, a number of men jumped on board, took out the two seamen, and immediately shoved alongside the brig and boarded her, and ordered all hands except the captain into the fore peak. After shutting the scuttle over they waited about ten minutes and ordered all hands on deck again; that at this time he the said Alfred Hill was stowed away amongst the cargo for the purpose of secreting himself; that the crew were called on deck separately; that he then heard a heavy groan from the captain and heard him distinctly repeat these words: 'Lord have mercy on my soul,' and heard a scuffling on deck and groans of the people; that after the noise had ceased, they commenced searching, as he supposed, for money; that about 4 o'clock in the afternoon they knocked out her bow port, when she immediately began to fill with water. Hearing a noise on deck at the time, he supposed that the pirates had not left her and was afraid to go upon deck; that having discovered the noise to proceed from the flapping of the sails, after having remained below until twilight, he went upon deck and got some blankets with which he endeavored to stop up the bow port, but found it no use, as the force of the sea washed them in again; that he then filled the topsails, to endeavor, if possible, to get her back into the harbor; that about three miles and a half from the shore she sunk."¹³⁶

Moved by this case and by others less atrocious, a number of merchants and underwriters of Boston called upon the Secretary of the Navy, Hon. John Branch, for protection and learned that steps to this end had already been taken. The *Hornet*, *Grampus*, and *Shark* were on the lookout and giving convov to merchantmen of different nations. The sloop of war *Erie*, which arrived at

¹³⁶ *Niles*, March 21, 1829.

Pensacola in April, sent out her boats in pursuit of pirates. The Governor of Matanzas offered large rewards for the apprehension of these outlaws. Several were hanged at St. Thomas in the spring of 1829. Others were shot at San Juan, Porto Rico. It was necessary to maintain a naval force in the West Indies for several years.¹³⁷ The system died a lingering death.

As late as 1832 the brig *Mexican*, of Salem, was captured, though not in the West Indies. This piracy was committed on the high seas southwest of the Azores and is the last on record in the North Atlantic ocean. Six of the pirate crew were executed in Boston three years later.¹³⁸

This conflict with pirates, extending over many years, may be regarded as by no means the least important of the minor wars in which our country has been engaged. The task of ridding the seas of a race of cruel and cowardly murderers, who were a menace to the peaceful trade and commercial interests of the world and to the lives of honest sailors, fell to the navy. The service was of a peculiarly trying sort and the officers and men of the navy and marine corps were called upon to endure hardships rarely met with in ordinary warfare. In a deadly climate they did their work with zeal, intelligence, patience, and fortitude.

¹³⁷ *Niles*, May 30, 1829.

¹³⁸ *Hist. Coll. Essex Inst.*, XXXIV (1898), 45.

APPENDIX I.

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APPENDIX II.

SQUADRONS.

The names of successive commanding officers of the various ships are given. All the vessels of a squadron were not on the station at any one time.

COMMODORE PATTERSON. 1814-1821.

- Hornet*, 18, sloop of war, Commanders James Biddle and George C. Read.
Boxer, 14, brig, Lieutenant John Porter.
Enterprise, 12, brig, Lieutenants James Renshaw and Lawrence Kearney.
Carolina, 14, schooner, Commander John D. Henley.
Lynx, 6, schooner, Lieutenant John R. Madison.
Firebrand, 6 $\frac{1}{2}$, schooner, Lieutenant Thomas S. Cunningham.
Nonsuch, 6, schooner, Lieutenants Lawrence Kearney and Daniel Turner.
Surprise, 6, ketch, Lieutenant Isaac McKeever.
Bull Dog, 2, felucca.
Sea Horse, 1, tender, Lieutenant Louis Alexis.
Tom Bowline, storeship, Lieutenant Beekman V. Hoffman.
Alabama, revenue cutter.
Louisiana, revenue cutter.
Gunboats Nos. 5, 23, 65, 156, 162, 163.
One Launch.

COMMODORE BIDDLE. 1822.

- Macedonian*, 36, frigate, Captain John Downes.
Congress, 36, frigate, Captain John D. Henley.
Cyane, 32, corvette, Captains Edward Trenchard and Robert T. Spence.
John Adams, 24, corvette, Commander Alexander S. Wadsworth.
Hornet, 18, sloop of war, Commander Robert Henley.
Peacock, 18, sloop of war, Commanders Thomas Brown and Stephen Cassin.
Spark, 12, brig, Commander John H. Elton.
Enterprise, 12, brig, Lieutenant Lawrence Kearney.

- Alligator*, 12, schooner, Lieutenants Robert F. Stockton, William H. Allen, and John M. Dale.
Grampus, 12, schooner, Lieutenant Francis H. Gregory.
Shark, 12, schooner, Lieutenant Matthew C. Perry.
Porpoise, 12, schooner, Lieutenant James Ramage.
 Gunboats, Nos. 158, 168.

COMMODORE PORTER.
 1823, 1824.

- John Adams*, 24, corvette, Commanders James Renshaw and Alexander J. Dallas.
Hornet, 18, sloop of war, Commanders Sidney Smith, Stephen Cassin, and Edmund P. Kennedy.
Peacock, 18, sloop of war, Commander Stephen Cassin.
Sea Gull, 3, steam galliot, Lieutenant William H. Watson, Commander Jesse Wilkinson, and Lieutenants Isaac McKeever and Ralph Voorhees.
Spark, 12, brig, Commander Jesse Wilkinson, Lieutenant John T. Newton.
Enterprise, 12, brig, Lieutenant John Gallagher.
Grampus, 12, schooner, Lieutenants Francis H. Gregory and John D. Sloat.
Porpoise, 12, schooner, Lieutenants James Ramage and Charles W. Skinner.
Shark, 12, schooner, Lieutenants Matthew C. Perry, Thomas H. Stevens, and John Gallagher.
Greyhound, 3, schooner, Commander John Porter, Lieutenant William A. C. Farragut.
Jackall, 3, schooner, Lieutenants Thomas H. Stevens, James P. Oellers, and John H. Lee.
Fox, 3, schooner, Lieutenants William H. Cocke, John T. Ritchie, and John A. Cook.
Beagle, 3, schooner, Lieutenants John T. Newton, Joseph Cross, Nathaniel L. Montgomery, and Charles P. Platt.
Ferret, 3, schooner, Lieutenants Samuel Henley and Charles H. Bell.
Terrier, 3, schooner, Lieutenants Robert M. Rose and John S. Paine.
Wild Cat, 3, schooner, Lieutenants Charles W. Skinner, James E. Legaré, and Frederick G. Wolbert.
Weasel, 3, schooner, Lieutenants Beverly Kennon, John P. Zantzinger, and Charles Boarman.

Decoy, 6, schooner, Lieutenants Lawrence Kearney, Francis
P. Gamble, and Mervine P. Mix.

Gallinipper

Mosquito

Gnat

Midge

Sand Fly

20-oared barges, Lieutenants Thomas M.
Newell and James McIntosh.

Diableta, barge.

Gunboats, Nos. 158, 168.

APPENDIX III.

ACTS OF THE FIFTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES.

Chap. 487. An Act to protect the Commerce of the United States, and punish the Crime of Piracy.

Sect. 1. *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

That the President of the United States be, and hereby is, authorized and requested to employ so many of the public armed vessels, as, in his judgment, the service may require, with suitable instructions to the commanders thereof, in protecting the merchant vessels of the United States and their crews, from piratical aggressions and depredations.

Sect. 2. *And be it further enacted,* That the President of the United States be, and hereby is, authorized to instruct the commanders of the public armed vessels of the United States to subdue, seize, take and send into any port of the United States, any armed vessel or boat, or any vessel or boat, the crew whereof shall be armed, and which shall have attempted or committed any piratical aggression, search, restraint, depredation, or seizure, upon any vessel of the United States, or of the citizens thereof, or upon any other vessel; and also to retake any vessel of the United States or its citizens, which may have been unlawfully captured upon the high seas.

Sect. 3. *And be it further enacted,* That the commander and crew of any merchant vessel of the United States, owned wholly, or in part, by a citizen thereof, may oppose and defend against any aggression, search, restraint, depredation, or seizure, which shall be attempted upon such vessel, or upon any other vessel owned as aforesaid, by the commander or crew of any armed vessel whatever, not being a public armed vessel of some nation in amity with the United States; and may subdue and capture the same; and may also retake any vessel, owned as aforesaid, which may have been captured by the commander or crew of any such armed vessel, and send the same into any port of the United States.

Sect. 4. *And be it further enacted,* That whenever any vessel or boat, from which any piratical aggression, search, restraint, depredation, or seizure, shall have been first at-

tempted or made, shall be captured and brought into any port of the United States, the same shall and may be adjudged and condemned to their use and that of the captors, after due process and trial, in any court having admiralty jurisdiction, and which shall be holden for the district into which such captured vessel shall be brought; and the same court shall thereupon order a sale and distribution thereof accordingly, and at their direction.

Sect. 5. *And be it further enacted*, That if any person or persons whatsoever, shall, on the high seas, commit the crime of piracy, as defined by the law of nations, and such offenders shall afterwards be brought into, or found in, the United States, every such offender or offenders shall, upon conviction thereof, before the circuit court of the United States for the district into which he or they may be brought, or in which he or they shall be found, be punished with death.

Sect. 6. *And be it further enacted*, That this act shall be in force until the end of the next session of Congress.

Approved, 3 March, 1819.

APPENDIX IV.

COMMODORE PORTER'S ORDERS.

Navy Department, February 1, 1823.

Sir :

You have been appointed to the command of a squadron, fitted out under an act of Congress, of the 20th of December last, to cruise in the West India seas and Gulf of Mexico, for the purpose of suppressing piracy and affording effectual protection to the citizens and commerce of the United States. Your attention will also be extended to the suppression of the slave trade, according to the provisions of the several acts of Congress on that subject, copies of which and of the instructions heretofore given to our naval commanders thereon, are herewith sent to you. While it is your duty to protect our commerce against all unlawful interruptions and to guard the rights, both of person and property, of the citizens of the United States, wherever it shall become necessary, you will observe the utmost caution not to encroach upon the rights of others, and should you at any time be brought into discussion or collision with any foreign power in relation to such rights, it will be expedient and proper that the same should be conducted with as much moderation and forbearance as is consistent with the honor of your country and the just claims of its citizens.

Should you in your cruise fall in with any foreign naval force engaged in the suppression of piracy, it is desirable that harmony and a good understanding should be cultivated between you and you will do everything on your part that accords with the honor of the American flag to promote this object.

So soon as the vessels at Norfolk shall be ready for sea, you will proceed to the West Indies by such route as you shall judge best for the purpose of effecting the object of your cruise. You will establish at Thompson's Island, usually called Key West, a depot, and land the ordnance and marines to protect the stores and provisions; if, however, you shall find any important objection to this place, and a more suitable and convenient one can be found, you are at liberty to select it as a depot.

You will announce your arrival and object to the authori-

ties, civil and military, of the Island of Cuba and endeavor to obtain, as far as shall be practicable, their co-operation or at least their favorable and friendly support, giving them the most unequivocal assurance that your sole object is the destruction of pirates.

The system of piracy which has grown up in the West Indies has obviously arisen from the war between Spain and the new governments, her late provinces in this hemisphere, and from the limited force in the islands and their sparse population, many portions of each being entirely uninhabited and desolate, to which the active authority of the government does not extend. It is understood that establishments have been made by parties of those banditti in those uninhabited parts, to which they carry their plunder and retreat in time of danger. It cannot be presumed that the government of any island will afford any protection or countenance to such robbers. It may on the contrary confidently be believed that all governments, and particularly those most exposed, will afford all means in their power for their suppression. Pirates are considered by the law of nations the enemies of the human race. It is the duty of all nations to put them down and none who respect their own character or interest will refuse to do it, much less afford them an asylum and protection. The nation that makes the greatest exertions to suppress such banditti, has the greatest merit. In making such exertions, it has a right to the aid of every other power to the extent of its means, and to the enjoyment, under its sanction, of all its rights in the pursuit of the object.

In the case of belligerents, where the army of one party enters the territory of a neutral power, the army of the other has a right to follow it there. In the case of pirates, the right of the armed force of one power to follow them into the territory of another is more complete. In regard to pirates there is no neutral party; they being the enemies of the human race, all nations are parties against them and may be considered as allies. The object and intention of our government is to respect the feelings as well as the rights of others, both in substance and in form, in all the measures which may be adopted to accomplish the end in view. Should, therefore, the crews of any vessels which you have seen engaged in acts of piracy, or which you have just cause to suspect of being of that character, retreat into the ports, harbors, or settled parts of the islands, you may enter in

pursuit of them such ports, harbors, and settled parts of the country for the purpose of aiding the local authorities or people, as the case may be, to seize and bring the offenders to justice, previously giving notice that this is your sole object. Where a government exists and is felt, you will in all instances respect the local authorities and only act in aid of and co-operate with them, it being the exclusive purpose of the United States to suppress piracy, an object in which all nations are equally interested and in the accomplishment of which the Spanish authorities and people will, it is presumed, cordially co-operate with you.

If in the pursuit of pirates found at sea, they shall retreat into the unsettled parts of the islands or foreign territory, you are at liberty to pursue them so long only as there is reasonable prospect of being able to apprehend them and in no case are you at liberty to pursue and apprehend any one after having been forbidden so to do by competent authority of the local government. And should you on such pursuit apprehend any pirates upon land, you will deliver them over to the proper authority, to be dealt with according to law, and you will furnish such evidence as shall be in your power to prove the offense alleged against them. Should the local authorities refuse to receive and prosecute such persons so apprehended, on your furnishing them with reasonable evidence of their guilt, you will then keep them safely and securely on board some of the vessels under your command and report without delay to this Department, the particular circumstances of such cases.

Great complaints are made of the interruption and injury to our commerce by privateers fitted out from Spanish ports. You will endeavor to obtain, from the Spanish authorities, a list of the vessels so commissioned and ascertain how far they have been instructed to intercept our trade with Mexico and the Columbian republic, impressing upon them that, according to the well settled rule of the law of nations, the United States will not consider any portion of coast upon the Gulf of Mexico as legally blockaded, except where a naval force is stationed sufficient to carry into effect the blockading order or decree; and that this government does not admit the right or authority of Spain to interdict or interrupt our commerce with any portion of the coast included within the Columbian republic or Mexican government, not actually blockaded by a competent force.

All the United States ships and vessels of war in the West Indies, of which a list is herewith enclosed, are placed under your command, and you will distribute them to such stations as shall appear to you best calculated to afford complete protection to our commerce, in which you will embrace the object of protecting the convoy of specie from Vera Cruz and the Mexican coast generally to the United States. Keep one vessel at least upon this service, to be at or near Vera Cruz during the healthy season of the year and to be relieved as occasion shall require, both for the convoy of trade and to bring specie to the United States, confining the transportation to the United States only.

You will be particularly watchful to preserve the health of the officers and crews under your command and to guard in every possible manner against the unhealthiness of the climate, not permitting any intercourse with the shore where the yellow fever prevails, except in cases of absolute necessity. Wishing you good health and a successful cruise,

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

SMITH THOMPSON.

Com. David Porter, commanding U. S. Naval Force,
West Indies.

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